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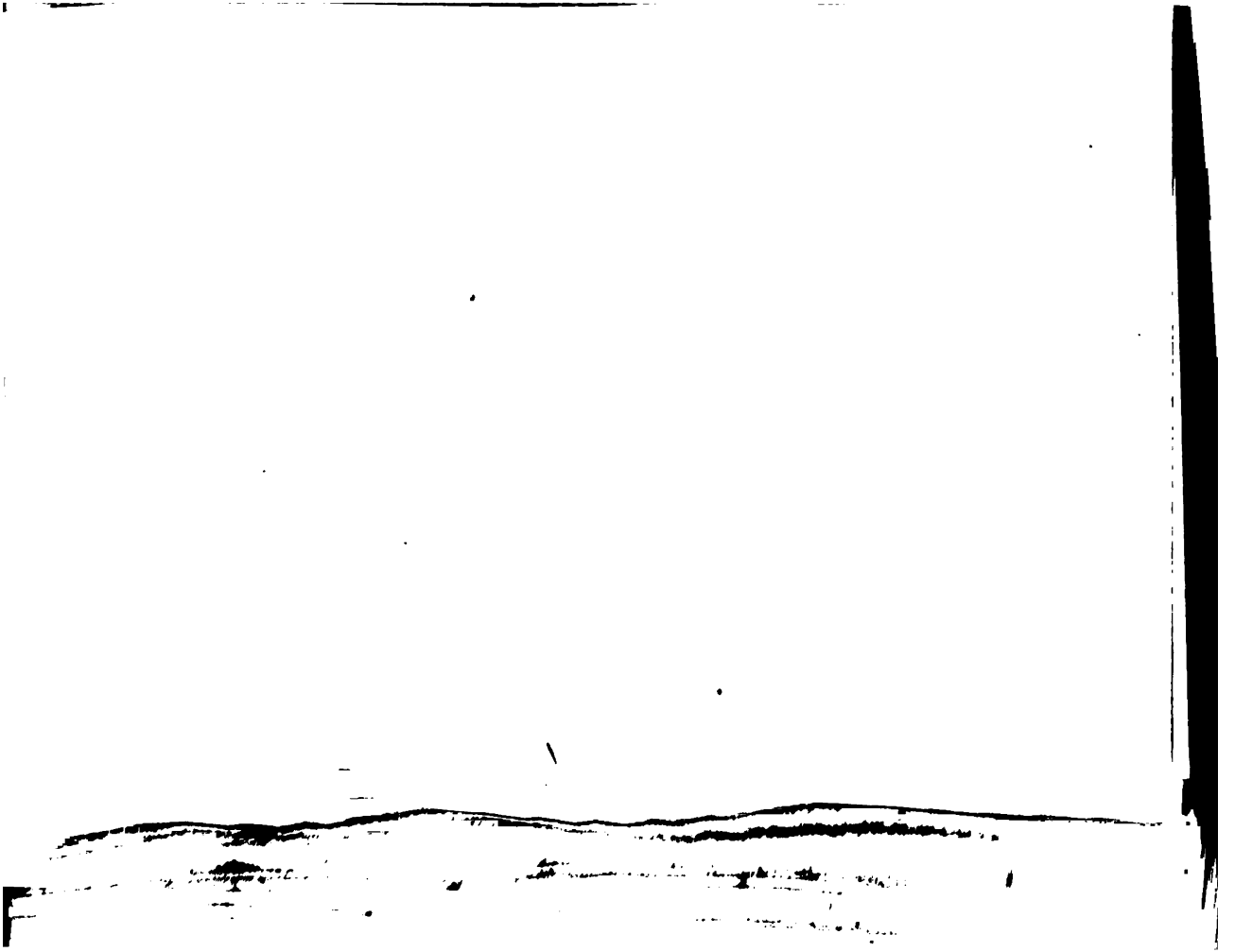

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ROBIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE fierce sun of August had all day long held Venice in its close embrace; but now that five o'clock had struck, the piazza, which during the mid-day heat had been deserted, began to show signs of life again.

"Between the columns," spot of evil omen, two Englishmen were standing bidding each other good-bye. One—on his way to Padua—was leaving by the evening train; the other—after the fashion of birds who while on the wing stay their flight—was stopping at Venice.

That morning neither had ever seen or spoken to the other, but the casual mention of Dr. North's name had set Mr. Veriker thinking, and ridding himself of his daughter by sending her to the Lido, he had hurried off to the Hôtel Luna, and asked the favor of an interview with the great London physician.

His request was granted, the two had since spent the remainder of the day together, and now they were parting like old friends.

"I cannot thank you half enough for the kindness you have done me," Mr. Veriker was saying.

"But no, don't speak of it in that way. I only wish I had had something more pleasant to say to you. Unhappily," and oh, what popularity that sigh and sympathetic shake of the head had gained him! "it is the

misfortune of doctors to give people unpalatable things to swallow."

"Truths are for the mos part apt to be unpalatable."

"Perhaps so; and yet to my mind it is always best to know the truth. The thing does not happen one whit the sooner because some one has said that some day it must come to pass. Besides," laying his hand encouragingly on his companion's shoulder, "we are not infallible; doctors differ."

"And patients die."

"Ah! that end comes to all of us; to me as well as to you. Many whom I have warned will be taking my physic long after I am under ground. So remember; live carefully, avoid excitement, and we shall meet in London."

He walked away. Mr. Veriker watched him out of sight; then turning round, he mechanically bent his steps towards the starting-place of those little "black steam-tugs," which, to the great scandal of Mr. Ruskin, convey the people of Venice to the Lido.

"You may die any day." The words, without any especial meaning for him, kept repeating themselves in Mr. Veriker's ears. "Die any day"—die—lie dead, stretched motionless and mute, while all the busy world went on around.

The host of speculations which followed this thought arrested Mr. Veriker's steps. Unconsciously he stopped short, leaned his elbows on a bit of rail which ran near, and threaded the mazes of a life of fifty years, while gazing down into the water which flowed below: seeing a boy—fruit of an ill-assorted marriage—neglected, uncared for, with a father grown old and selfish, and a mother too young and thoughtless to take trouble in shaping a nature which only needed love to guide its course aright; seeing a youth, headstrong, impatient, refusing all control from those who he knew had prophesied that their advice would be thrown away; seeing a man after thirty years of life—spent no matter how—trying to start afresh, for the reason that

on him was fixed the faith and trust of one whose love could see no failure.

Alas! how many stumbles he had made which that dear heart had shut her eyes to—and his own, growing dim, obscured the rest of the sad picture, for all too soon Death had claimed her for his own, and the husband, and the child that she had borne him, had had to learn to live without her.—Yes; she had died.

Surely, in all the years that had passed since then, never had Mr. Veriker seen his wife so bodily—the magic power of memory brought before him the room, its furniture, with all those dread accessories by which death is made more terrible.

"Good God!" standing erect, he made a gasp for breath, for in that momentary vision the lighted candles, the heavy perfumed flowers, the leaden weight of that o'erspreading sheet had seemed to stifle him, and sighing audibly he took off his hat so that the little seaward-wafted breeze might fan him more readily; then knitting himself together by a movement which seemed to assert the power of motion, he walked towards the steamboat with a quick step as if to outstride the shadow which stalked behind him.

That reverie of his had eaten into more time than he had an idea of—it had made a good hole in an hour—and seven o'clock struck as he passed through the bathing establishment on to the balcony in search of his daughter.

On an evening such as this, one was sure to find a crowd assembled here; and Mr. Veriker's eyes ran over the heads of those seated at the numerous little tables, to skirt the railing, over and against which a line of people stood lounging.

"Ah!" His face told that he had found what he sought, that his eyes were resting upon those they had been looking for. Mr. Veriker was a singularly handsome man, and the pause he had made had attracted the notice of a party of diners, who smiled significantly as they saw him suddenly walk straight across to an

opposite point, and by a rather brusque movement place himself between a young man and a girl, who were thus separated.

"And what may you two people be talking about together, eh?"

His eyes, which had rapidly scanned both faces, while his elbows widened the distance between them, now plunged themselves into the sea.

"Why, papa, it's you. I was just going to fire up at the rude monster," and she snuggled herself up against him, "who had pushed himself in between us two; and look at Jack's face—isn't it red? that will tell you what he intended to do."

"I expected to find you wondering what had become of me."

Mr. Veriker's voice sounded as unusually stern as his manner was unusually odd. But his daughter, accustomed only to the perfect good-fellowship which reigned between them, set this down to the probable worry of the business engagement for which her father had left her.

"I *was* wondering," she said. "I came out of the water very early indeed, and I could not think what had become of you."

"I had no idea myself that I should be kept until seven o'clock."

"Seven o'clock! Was that seven that struck? Why, I thought it was five—didn't you? did you think it was seven, Jack?"

"Not until I heard the clock, I didn't."

"Just fancy that! We're a nice pair together, aren't we? Papa, what do you think?"

"Think, my dear? That I wish you wouldn't call our friend here Jack. You know, you are growing up—you're getting quite a woman now, and there are some things that'll have to be left off: that are not quite in keeping—are they?" and though he did not raise his eyes, his head slightly turned towards the young man in question.

"Really, I have never given the matter any consideration"—the answer came a little stiffly. "I don't quite remember how it happened, but it would seem as strange for her now not to call me Jack, as if I didn't call her Robin."

There was a few minutes' pause, broken at length by the anxious inquiry of:

"Don't you feel well, papa?"

"*Well*, my dear! Certainly I feel well—what should make you ask such a question?"

Mr. Veriker no longer lounged, but drew himself up into an erect position.

"Oh, I know! You want your dinner. I'm starving, and so is Ja——" She drew back at the end of the name, made a dumb show of swallowing it down, and then, with a look of mimic pleading to her father, said: "You really must let me off, papa; I can't call him Mr. Dorian, not while he looks as he does now."

"I don't see anything at all particular in his look now."

"Don't you? but I fancy there is though, and about my look too, by the way people have been staring at us."

"Staring at you, if you like," put in Jack by way of mending matters.

"At me! well, I don't see there is more to look at in me than in you. This dress has got a little bit skimpy, perhaps," and by the movement she made she tried to lengthen it down; "and the water hasn't improved the color of my hat, but the shape is all right," and having taken it off, she surveyed it critically, "perfectly," placing it on again. "So there."

The eyes of both men turned upon her. Jack Dorian smiled; Mr. Veriker's face twitched.

"Why do you go about dressed like this, Robin?" he said. "You ought to have some new clothes."

"But I shall be delighted to have some new clothes, if you can find any money to pay for them; and if there is anything to spar., perhaps you'll be generous

to Jack, and then I may find it possible to call him *Mr. Dorian.*"

Jack rubbed his hand over his coat, and fell to examining it about the elbows.

"I can't think how it is the confounded things wear out as they do. I'm sure they used to last much longer," he said. "Upon my life, though, I didn't know I was quite so seedy-looking as I am."

"My dear fellow, we're all in about the same condition," and Mr. Veriker cast a rueful eye upon his own garments.

"And what if we are?" and Robin drew herself up. "We're by long odds the best-looking people here. As for you, daddy, you're the handsomest man in all the world, everybody knows that—and this afternoon some one told me," and she threw a mischievous look towards Jack, "that there was not another girl in the place half as good-looking as I am; so it's hard if we two can't manage to pass off a bad third between us."

Jack's face had got rather red, but already—pretending to descry in the distance her most devoted waiter—Robin was off, and the two were left together alone. Mr. Veriker gave a shake of his head.

"You shouldn't put such thoughts into her head," he said; "girls find out things of that sort far too soon."

"But you know that I would not say a word to her that I thought you would not approve of. You may trust me for that."

"My dear fellow, I *have* trusted you already."

"And I have in no way abused your trust."

"No, I don't believe you have. God grant that I have not abused my own; but it's a difficult task for an idle man like me to have the entire guidance of a young girl like Robin. I did not feel it when she was a child; but now—when—oh, the thing won't bear a thought! Come along," hurrying off, "let's look after our dinner; perhaps that will drive the blues away. Somehow I've got a fit of them on me to-day that I can't get rid of."

But though the dinner was a marvel in the art of discreet ordering, Mr. Veriker, impatient to be seated, had no appetite to partake of it. Jack, with forethought, for which a look from Robin blessed him, feigned it impossible to get on unless they had a little better wine; but the wine there, Mr. Veriker drank but a small share of it.

"No," he said, "it's only that the sun has been hot, and that heat tries me now. I thought I should be all right this evening when I got out here, but somehow I can't rise to the occasion."

"Don't let us stop here any longer; let's go back and sit in the piazza. The band will be playing and we could have some ices."

"That doesn't sound half bad, does it, Robin?"

"It is the very thing I was wishing for."

All that her father desired, and lately much that Jack Dorian had wanted to do, was safe to be the very thing Robin was wishing for. Hers was that woman-nature whose pleasure comes from those she loves being pleased.

Accustomed by the habits of their wandering life to make many friends, not one among them had ever been what Jack Dorian was to her. Their acquaintance had commenced at Nice some three winters before, when Robin, looked on as a child by the men who visited her father, had been singled out by Jack to tease, to pet, to romp with. Small for her age, she was then fourteen; she had so grown since, that now at seventeen she was quite a woman; and some weeks before, with thoughts of this kind floating in her mind, Robin had taken from beneath her chin a flower which Jack had given her to fasten there, and holding it in her hand, had fixed her eyes on it, bringing it nearer and nearer to her lips, until for an instant it lay pressed against them, then, with a sudden glow which sent the color mounting up from check to brow, she threw it out of the open window, and, turning, quickly ran away, still blushing at she knew not what.

The memory of this little action gave her manner when next they met a half-shy consciousness, with just that suspicion of embarrassment a lover is so proud to seize upon. Not that Jack had any thought of being Robin's lover—at least the notion had not come to him until the moment when her coy glance sent a sudden thrill which set his heart beating, and shot from out his eyes a fire which Robin's lids drooped under.

Since that day, children playing with edged tools the two had been; Robin by turns silent, elated, shy, defiant; Jack—it is difficult to analyze what Jack felt; he was twenty-five, and imagined that he had had a good experience in the tender passion. What then was this sudden feeling that he had for Robin? not love—that is if he had ever known love before; not friendship—he could not deceive himself so far as that. Was it brotherly affection, sympathy, compassion perhaps! Yes, all of these, and with them all a something so far beyond, that it outstripped the rest and left him doubtful as before.

CHAPTER II.

MIDNIGHT had struck, and Mr. Veriker, who at ten o'clock had declared himself too tired to remain out any longer, was still up and abroad.

At the door of the hotel—to Robin's surprise—instead of going in with her, he proposed taking a turn in Jack Dorian's company. He would "have a cigar," he said—he had not wanted one before, he had been fidgeting to get home; now that he was there, he felt it was useless going to bed—he should not sleep. Perhaps a smoke might help him.

"He isn't himself," thought Jack, as they strolled through the Merceria in the direction of the Rialto; "something has gone wrong with him;" and jumping at the conclusion that this something must be money,

he ran over his resources with a view of rendering any help that was in his power. It did not strike him that this generosity towards a man who had no claim upon him was very foreign to his nature; the desire to assist Mr. Veriker was so spontaneous that it seemed to take the shape of a necessity, and Jack was all anxiety to learn the extent of the demand.

Knowing by experience how difficult it is to make the first plunge, he was prepared for some preamble; and, though he did not quite see how the bush was to be beaten round by entering upon a dissertation upon Venice, its past glory and its present decay, he did his part of listener with a manly grace. But when an hour had gone, the whole time of which had been spent in walking, and they were back again on the Riva dei Schiavoni, with the subject no nearer than it had seemed at starting, Jack's patience began to give way. What did it mean? Had he made a mistake? Did Mr. Veriker tell nothing because he had nothing to tell? If so, they had mooned about quite as long as, that night, Jack had a mind for; he was tired, sleepy, would light up one more cigar, to last him as far as the hotel, and then drop a quiet hint that it was time they began to move homewards.

"I thought you'd want to stop here"—they were crossing the Ponte della Paglia. "I can never go by without having a look at that place."

Mr. Veriker's eyes were turned towards the Bridge of Sighs.

"To think of those," he said, "who have crossed over there with the song of death sounding in their ears."

"Ah!" and Jack leaned over to watch the descent of his fusee as it dropped into the dark water below, "that's a music we none of us care much for."

"And yet we have to listen, whether we like it or not."

"When our time comes I suppose we have."

"And who knows how soon that may be? Death has so many doors to let out life."

"True; but he's not in any immediate hurry to open yours or mine just yet, I hope."

"Oh! I don't know. If I was alone in the world, I should not much care. Life has not so many charms left for me."

He had taken up his place by Jack's side, and was resting his arms on the stone-work.

"The sting of death in my case is having to leave a girl fatherless, friendless, penniless, as Robin will be."

"Yes, that's a serious consideration."

Jack's face became thoughtful. Robin alone, unprotected! His heart grew big towards her.

"But long before anything of that sort is likely to happen," and his tone sounded prophetically confident, "she is certain to have some one to fill your place."

"Fill my place! how fill my place?"

Jack smiled. Already he foresaw the rivalry that was likely to exist between Robin's husband and her father.

"Why, you expect her to marry, don't you?—she'll have a husband!"

"Nothing more unlikely," said Mr. Veriker sharply. "Whom does she see, in the life we lead, that I should care for her to marry? No, no; the husband I want for Robin is a simple honest fellow, who would work to maintain his wife; not such a one as myself, living God knows how."

Without a syllable on which he could lay hold being spoken, Jack felt an arrow had been aimed at him.

"It is to be hoped you will find your daughter's taste runs with your own," he said cynically.

"No, I don't expect that. Robin is too much her mother's child to take prudence for a guide where her heart is concerned. And that is why I have felt a little disturbed that you and she have been so much together of late. Not on your account. You have seen too much of life to give a second thought to a girl like Robin, and I don't harbor a suspicion that you would

trifle in any way with her. But—well, there's a woman's heart beating inside the child, full of love to be poured out like water at the touch of the one who places his finger on the right spring, and—it may be only my fancy—but I have thought her a little altered of late, preoccupied, variable, silent. I dare say it's my imagination, but it has nevertheless managed to give me a considerable amount of worry."

The dark cloud which had gathered on Jack's face rolled away while listening to that birth of love begotten of himself, as he knew it to be.

"Don't be anxious because you think I do not care for Robin," he began, and the softened tone of his voice was but another whip to goad on Mr. Veriker's fears. "I———"

"Should be fifty thousand times more anxious if I thought you did," interrupted Mr. Veriker quickly. "No, my dear fellow, don't misunderstand me; the confidence I place in you is my sheet-anchor; I know you well enough to be quite certain that, seeing what Robin's position is—without any one to guide her, and nobody to look after her but a scapegrace of a father, who leaves her entirely to her own devices—you would be the last to take advantage of my supineness or her situation."

"I don't know that taking an advantage ever occurred to me," said Jack stiffly.

"Certainly it never did, and it never would to an honorable man; and in spite of what the straitlaced may find to say against us, we haven't quite forgotten the meaning of that word, at all events in our dealings one with the other, eh?"

Jack did not answer, but inwardly he winced under words which jarred on his inmost sensibilities, and set his pride in array. He ranked with Veriker! a man whose weak nature and shifty morality he despised; the sting was indeed bitter. True, for the last twelve months or so, it had happened that they had been greatly thrown together; but Jack considered the space

between them in no way narrowed by the intercourse.

"What am I to understand?" he said. "Is it that you wish me to go away from here?"—all thought of love for Robin had fled before the bare suspicion that any offer on his part was not an immense condescension, one he had intended to hamper with restrictions and conditions such as became the surroundings he had been brought up in, rather than those by which he was now encircled.

"Away! no, certainly not. What I meant was not to be, well—quite so much with her as you are."

"Who is to be with her, then?" and Jack put the question harshly. "Do you wish her to run the place over by herself?—it was because of the bathing and the boating here together that you pressed me to come."

"Yes, yes! I know," and Mr. Veriker gave a despondent shake of the head; "it's my own fault, as everything that has gone wrong in my life has been. Jack, I wonder sometimes you don't take warning by me. I wish to God you would—I should like to think I'd done somebody some good before I—die."

The word was forced out by an effort, but the effort was lost upon Jack.

"Oh, no doubt you'll do your daughter a good turn," he said, "if you succeed in finding this model son-in-law for yourself."

"Ah, yes! now your back's up because of the way I took what you said about Robin." (Jack was in the habit of giving his friends an occasional taste of a not over-easy temper.) "But you don't know all the reasons I have for speaking as I did—you don't know that it's on the cards (for the little we have goes when I'm gone) that any moment—to-night, to-morrow, whenever you like to name—without word or warning she may be left destitute."

"How?" and Jack turned with a sceptical look; but something he saw arrested his further speech.

Mr. Veriker, overcome by the agitation of giving

vent to the secret which all that day had hung on him like a log, had turned deathly white with a pallor visible in the moonlight; his features were drawn; his lips, rigid and parted, seemed striving to keep back the groans which the agony he was suffering would have made a relief.

"You're ill—faint!" exclaimed Jack.

By a gesture of the hand, which was clutched over his heart, Mr. Veriker indicated that the sudden spasm of unendurable pain was already abating.

"Better now," he gasped in answer to Jack's anxious scrutiny—"it will pass in a minute;" and the tension of his limbs giving way, he dropped his head upon his arms, and let his face rest on them.

"Poor fellow!" thought Jack, "there's something in this; he is really ill;" and a moment after, when Mr. Veriker recovered and looked up, he was met by an expression of earnest sympathy.

"I frightened you," he said, with a poor attempt at smiling.

"I wasn't prepared to see you like this," Jack answered; "have you ever been taken so before?"

"Several times—not always so severe, but on and off very bad. No going to Monte Carlo this winter, Jack. Couldn't stand the tables; the excitement would kill me. I do pretty well while things go on smoothly; but get anxious, and it's all up with me. Any day I might drop down and "give in my chips," as the Yankees say. I mean it," for Jack looked incredulous. "Though I didn't tell you so, I went to see North this morning, and asked him to speak out, to tell me the truth—because of Robin, you know; and though, as he said, I might hang on for years, he advised me, if I had any affairs to settle, to put them in order."

"Well, I think he was wise there; and you'll do so, won't you? It will save you anxiety, besides being the right thing to do for your daughter."

Mr. Veriker sighed.

'Poor child," he said, "it's late in the day to try and begin to set the wrong I have done her, right. I haven't a penny to leave her; I haven't a friend to trust her to. Oh! I see it all now; my cursed selfishness kept her with me, when I ought to have given her up to those who at least could have provided her with food to eat, and a roof to shelter her. But no; I wouldn't part with her, and now I dare say they'd see her starve before they'd hold out a finger to help her."

"Have you tried them?"

"No; it's been on my mind to write for the last month and more, but I can't swallow down my pride; it seems to stick in my gizzard more and more."

"Are they relations of yours?"

"After a fashion they are. It's the husband of Robin's mother's sister. I like to make the connection as roundabout as I can—it puts the fellow further from me. He's a brute that turns everything into money that he touches."

"Ah!" sighed Jack, "I wish he would rub shoulders with me, then."

"It wouldn't matter—whatever came of it would stick to him. Soon after my wife died, they offered to take Robin; but I wouldn't let her go, and they took it as a mortal offence, since then we haven't troubled each other much."

"But if they knew, don't you think they'd take her now?"

"Do you think she'd leave me?"

"Oh, they could hardly expect that; but in case of anything happening to you, people could hardly see their sister's child cast on the world a beggar, without coming forward to assist her in some way."

"Oh, I don't know—besides, the sister herself is dead now, so the claim is less than ever."

"Still, you seem to have had some idea of writing to ask."

"Simply because I don't know of any other thing

to do; and when I'm driven into a corner by the thought of that girl with her looks, and her spirit, left alone in the world, without a living soul to turn to, Jack, I could pray God to see her dead rather than leave her to all she may be exposed to. They might find her a situation—something to do, mightn't they?"

Jack made no reply.

"She can chatter away in French and Italian, you know; and she has picked up enough music—the Lord only knows how—to play on the piano, and she's got a voice like a nightingale. Something might be made of all that, one would think, eh? what should you say?"

Jack shook his head impatiently.

"I haven't an idea," he said. "What I'm wondering at is that you, knowing all this, should have stopped what you fancied I might be going to say as you did. What made you do it, eh?"

"About you having a liking for her, do you mean?"

Jack nodded assent.

Mr. Veriker seemed about to answer, hesitated, cast a furtive look at Jack, and then, apparently overcome by a resolution which mastered him, he said firmly:

"Well, I'll tell you; you're too much like myself—you don't like that, do you?" for Jack had drawn himself up and stood his six feet erect. "I understand. There was a time when I shouldn't have liked it. When I was your age, there were men then whom I said I could never be like; but gradually I slid down to their level, as you'll do to mine. Mine! far lower than mine, for as you have the making of a better man in you than ever I had in me, so, if nothing stops you, you'll fall to a depth I should never have touched; and that's why I don't want the child to care for you, as something makes me half afraid she has already begun to do. It isn't that I don't like you, Jack. If it wasn't for Robin, I'd rather have you about with us than any fellow I know, but——"

"There's no need to say any more," said Jack coldly, "you've given me quite reasons enough."

"And I've offended you by them. That's what I feared I should do if I spoke the truth."

"No, I am not at all offended, if it is any satisfaction to you. I am very much obliged. You have shown me what it is always good for us to know—how we are regarded by other people."

Did he mean what he said? was he angry or not! Sometimes with Jack it was very difficult to decide, and Mr. Veriker was still trying to discover, when Jack added:

"And to show how obliged I am to you I shall try to hit some plan so as to leave Venice as soon as possible."

"What—leave here altogether?"

"Isn't that the best thing I can do?'

Mr. Veriker was silent.

"I suppose it is," he said at length. "I don't know though, how Robin and I shall get on without you—we've got so used to being all together, it seems hard to part. But there, perhaps it's best—I don't know."

"By far the best," said Jack resolutely. "I feel now that I ought to have gone away long ago. I had no right to stay on when I knew I had nothing to offer Robin. If I had, I should ask her now to share it with me."

"Thank you, Jack," said Mr. Veriker more heartily; "it's kind of you to say that, and I wish I could show you that I feel it so."

"Write that letter, then, about Robin to those people you spoke of."

"You advise it, do you?"

"In your place I would do it without a day's delay."

"Come along, then; I'll go back home and write it to-night. If a thing's to be done, they say there's no time like the present. A hundred to one if I leave it hanging over me until to-morrow, I shall never do it at all."

CHAPTER III.

JACK walked with Mr. Veriker to the door of his hotel, bade him good-night, made him renew his promise, and then left him, not to fulfil the intention he had announced of going straight off to bed, but to retrace his steps to the spot he had just left, as being the fittest place for undisturbed reflection.

He wanted to take commune with himself, to review his past, and reflect on his present situation—a by no means pleasant task, for Jack was a stern master, not more lenient to himself than he was to others.

There was nothing uncommon about his story. It was the oft-told tale of a struggle between newly-fledged independence and overstrained authority. As long as Jack was bound to obey, his uncle, Mr. Chandos, had not pushed him to extremities; but the moment it came upon him that his nephew was free, imperceptibly the reins tightened, and this notwithstanding the restiveness Jack showed each time the curb was felt by him.

Uncle and nephew had inherited the same disposition—each desired his own way, and had a rooted dislike to be thwarted or interfered with. Who was now to give in? not Jack, he had always given in; not Mr. Chandos, he had never given in. By turns over-blamed, over-praised, thwarted, made much of, Jack's bringing-up had left a great deal to be desired. His father was dead, had died when Jack was a child; his mother had married again, and had gone to India to be engrossed by fresh interests and new surroundings. Jack, left at school, was understood to be adopted by his uncle, who had recently inherited an estate which obliged him to assume the name of Chandos.

At the time he became possessed of this property, Mr. Chandos was past fifty, and a bachelor. He had never married, because, had he done so, he must have

deprived himself of luxuries which, far more than a wife, he found essential to his comfort.

Now that he was master of a good income, and owner of a handsome estate, he regretted his former wisdom; it was not that he wanted a wife, but he wanted an heir, one born of his own body, so that he might feel that even when he was dead, a part of himself still enjoyed what he had left behind.

To a mind so constituted, Jack's presence could never be entirely welcome, and in token of it the boy was kept at school; and when the holiday time came round, and he returned home, it was generally to find the Manor shut up, his uncle away, and he expected to spend his vacation with the Temples at the Rectory.

Under such circumstances, was it possible that much affection should exist between them? Aunt Temple—the rector's wife, in reality a cousin of the Dorians—was always holding up Mr. Chandos as a bogie to Jack, and to her own children.

Frightened to death of him herself, she seemed to desire that others should be inspired with a similar awe; and not being gifted with the spirit of reticence, when out of humor she freely commented on her cousin's obstinacy and selfishness, and openly laughed at an old fellow like that being married for love.

For, with the strange craving most of us have to possess that which is beyond our reach, Mr. Chandos desired to find favor with some young girl who would bestow her heart on him; and it was after this chimerical idea he sought, and, though over fifteen years had passed, he was still seeking.

In the meantime, though he never failed to remind Jack that it was not probable he would ever have more than the few thousands his father had left him, and the little which he, his uncle, might choose to add to it, he interfered with every plan the boy formed.

What! want to be a soldier! to be sent off no one could say where, to die of fever or to be killed in battle! Pray, in case of anything happening to him, who

was to inherit Chandos Manor ?—the idea was absurd. Jack would like to be an engineer. The possible future owner of Chandos Manor working at the construction of railways or making steam engines !—the bare notion was degrading.

Mr. Chandos had provided for Jack during his stay at Eton, he now desired that he would go to Oxford, enter himself at a college where he could work, and so be ready—should it be needed—with knowledge to be turned to account.

With a very ill grace, to Oxford Jack went; soon was mixed up with a very fast set; spent more money than he had any right to spend; had his debts paid; promised amendment; broke his word; got into a serious scrape, was rusticated; and then, threatened by his uncle, grew obstinate, rebellious, defiant, refused to acknowledge that he was under any authority to him, and ended by drawing out the money which had been invested for him, and which being of age, he could claim as his own, sending his uncle a check for the sum he had paid for his debts at Oxford; and with a not unprovoked letter to Mr. Chandos by way of farewell, Jack bade adieu to England, and started for Paris, determined to enjoy abroad the spending of some portion of those thousands which still remained to his credit.

We all know how endless in the eyes of youth seems the first large sum of money it has command of. It appeared to Jack that such a sum would last—well, if not for ever, for far longer than he should want to be knocking idly about. Besides, it was not likely that his uncle would hold out now, when he had given in so often; for of late years there had always been a tug of war ending in a compromise between the two.

Everybody said Mr. Chandos would never marry, and if he did not, Jack must have the place if he did not have the money; and then the people about were all on his side. The rector was certain to say a good

word for him, and as for Aunt Temple, she said in her letter that she'd never let his uncle have any peace until he sent and had Jack back among them.

Mistaken friends, who, by their ill-judged zeal, only made an obstinate man more resolute than before; he was more furious against Jack than ever when he found how many advocates he had to plead his cause.

Unfortunately the London season was over, and nearer, in his own neighborhood, none of the ladies on promotion met his taste. So his man was ordered to pack his things without delay that he might go to Harrogate, Scarborough; search the marriage markets of the United Kingdom over but he would return with a bride, and have an heir who should make his insolent nephew hide his diminished head.

But seeking is one thing, finding another, more especially when the object sought for is to be adorned by all the graces and gifted by all the virtues. Nearly five years had passed away, and Mr. Chandos was still on the look-out, heralded by the prestige of being a rich man seeking for a wife.

People at home began to lose hope and to give up pleading for Jack, and a fear spreading abroad that if Mr. Chandos did not marry, he would leave his property elsewhere, Mrs. Temple began to think that, if Jack did not have it, she did not see why her girls should not reap the benefit. There were three of them : Isabel, Georgy, and Dora; they were nearer to him than strangers could be.

No one could say that she was not fond of Jack; but still, in their position, it was like giving countenance to evil, not to take some notice if the reports were true: and people did say that he had become quite a gambler, and associated with very odd persons, who lived by their wits, nobody knew how.

So Jack's correspondents first made their letters brief, then cold, and then gave up writing altogether. Evidently his relatives were bent on dropping him. Well, they must do as pleased them best; and he

feigned to smile as if the thought amused him, when in reality it stung him to the quick. For much as appearances seemed against him, of late Jack's mode of life had been a matter of necessity rather than of choice. He was already about to break into the last few hundred pounds of that inexhaustible sum with which he had started, and when that was gone, where was he to turn for more?

A dozen spectres rose up before him, each of whom bore a likeness to some needy adventurer whom Jack despised. Was there no better fate in store for him, than that he should sink down to the level of such men as these? of every one of whom was told the tale of wealth, position, credit gone; all staked, and lost.

During the two months of perfect quiet which Jack had spent at Venice with the Verikers—who had stayed on there first because Mr. Veriker had been unwell, and afterwards because at that season everything was so cheap—he had ample opportunity for reflection, but it seemed as if something was needed to bring him to the point of action. This something had been just supplied in the blow Mr. Veriker had given him. For a moment his pride had been overcome by indignation, but the sight of the father's despair over the misery he foresaw for his daughter had made Jack realize his own situation. As he was, Mr. Veriker had been; unless a change came, what Mr. Veriker was he might be.

"Never! never! never!"

He turned suddenly round—it was his own voice that had startled him. In his excitement he had spoken the words aloud.

The movement changed his former dreaming into a more vigorous train of thought—something must be done. By what means could he do it? where were his friends? and to whom among them could he apply?

He did not cast a thought towards his uncle, and gradually, one by one, he set aside as useless all those who had any immediate intercourse with him; and, having by these means thinned the ranks very consid-

erably, he found himself reduced to a choice of two alternatives. He must apply to Mr. Clarkson—who had been his father's lawyer, and who had condemned most unsparingly the folly of his former proceedings; or put an advertisement into some paper for work—work of any kind, he did not care what. In the heat of his present state he felt that breaking stones on the road would be preferable to his present life.

With the desire to escape obligation to Mr. Clarkson, he inclined towards advertising until reminded that a reference would probably be asked, and to whom could he refer? No; the first plan was best, he must swallow his pride, and ask the favor of the old fellow. He could but say "No;" and if he did, then he would try the paper. But how to word his request? Jack's steps were now turned towards his hotel. During that walk back, he framed fifty letters seemingly eloquent enough then, but unsuitable to the last degree when, seated in his room, pen in hand, he was prepared to commit his thoughts to paper.

"'DEAR MR. CLARKSON,—DEAR SIR,—DEAR MR. CLARKSON,"—

"Oh, it's of no use; I can't do it!" and jumping up he flung down his pen. "I've thought and thought till I'm sick of thinking, and not a word that I want to say will come."

Then after two or three minutes' standing, during which there crept into his face an expression of indomitable will, Jack seated himself again at the table, and without waiting or giving himself any further time to consider, he wrote:

"DEAR MR. CLARKSON:

"When we parted we were both angry with each other. You, because I persisted in doing what was foolish; I, because you persisted in advising what was wise.

"Your prophesy has come to pass. In a foreign land I have wasted my substance in riotous living; and now that I begin, like the prodigal, to be in want, no

man offers to assist me. So far a confession of the past; now for the future. I mean to work, and live independently of anybody. I won't apply to my uncle. My mother is too far away; will you give me your assistance? I am ready to turn my hand to anything, so if you have any writing or copying, or anything that in an office is found to do; or if you will employ me, or say a word in my favor to anybody else, I shall be much obliged to you. I shall remain in Venice as long as I think there is any chance of your answering this letter, but as I want to be employed, the quicker I can find something to do the better."

"Yours sincerely,

"JOHN DORIAN."

CHAPTER IV

UNDER the weary suspense which followed the sending of those two letters, for it happened that in the same bag with Jack's lay the one which Mr. Veriker had written, the elder man became silent and depressed, the younger anxious and irritable. Neither cared to discuss with the other the steps he had taken, and by tacit consent of both not a word was to be breathed to Robin. She, poor child, ignorant of any cause, racked her brains in trying to discover what had gone wrong with her father, and what could have changed Jack, so that in some ways—and here came forth a most lugubrious sigh—he was not a bit like the same to her. Time was, and barely more than a month since too, when Robin would have frankly asked the question. But now a certain self-consciousness forbade inquiry, as first a flood of color, and then a shower of tears, recalled looks no longer given; and the hand her face was leaning against she thrust out of sight, because of a tormenting fear that it had been left trembling too long in a palm waiting for a pressure which had not come.

Experience had given Robin some familiarity with Jack's idiosyncrasies. She knew it was impossible for him to take things easily; knew that a trivial accident, a misadventure passed unheeded by her father, would put Jack out for the day. She had seen him on—seemingly to her—slight provocation give way to outbursts of anger which had almost terrified her, but in balance to these failings he had qualities which Robin thought belonged to nobody but him; for, in the sad experience of her young life, whom else had she known in whom she could place implicit trust, to tell her what was right, to point out what was wrong, and show by all his dealings that he practised the honesty he taught?

The girl heaped on her father the treasures of a love which for years had had nothing else to spend itself upon; but though she shut her eyes to his failings, she winced under the knowledge of them, and by turns grew angry and pleaded with a sense of honor which compelled her to condemn many things she saw him do. It was Jack who had first taught her to be ashamed of practices which up to that time everyone had applauded her for: cunning evasions, clever misleadings, shifty advantages in payments and purchases. Oh, how bitterly had she been galled by Jack's outspoken opinion of such dealings!

It was soon after their more intimate acquaintance that, indignant at such a training, he had reproached her father in no measured terms, to be recalled to the fact of Robin's presence by seeing her rush from the room in a passion of tears. Distressed at having unintentionally wounded the child, who among her father's visitors was a universal favorite, he presented himself the next day with a fine package of bonbons, and finding her alone, asked her forgiveness as he placed them in her hands.

An explanation followed, the poor swelling heart was opened to seek counsel and direction, and from that day Jack and Robin became sworn friends, master and pupil—the master inclined at times to abuse the

privilege of his position by encouraging, petting, scolding, neglecting, as the mood was on him. On occasions, carried away by some whirlwind of passion, Jack for months would seem lost to Robin: she here, he there; would they ever meet again?

Oh yes! the fancy over, at one of the headquarters of resort back would come Jack, to be welcomed none the less warmly, because Robin felt certain in herself that he was suffering the tortures of a broken heart.

At Monaco during the previous winter they had seen more than ever of each other, and after being parted for a short time, it was at Robin's entreaty more than at Mr. Veriker's request that Jack had joined them at Venice.

For two months they had lived daily in one another's company, so engrossed that they had failed to notice how little they missed other society. Even the flimsy pretexts by which Mr. Veriker sought to hide the failing health which prevented his joining them, they accepted as veritable excuses for his stopping behind; and while they were absent the hours ran so swiftly that as he did not say so, they never guessed that time could hang heavy on his hands!

Oh, happy season! Oh, magic birth! which Robin felt quicken into life before she knew what name to call it by; and Jack, who before had often masqueraded with the passion, now that it came undisguised, refused to believe the voice that called it love.

Alas! the moment he was resolved to stay away, to see less of Robin, to avoid her company, the struggle he had to make revealed the truth; and, almost absurd as the idea was of being in love with Robin, Jack had to confess that the child to whom, after a very blundering fashion, he had tried to tell what long ago they had told him was the right thing to do, had contrived, while learning the lesson, to steal away his heart and give him in exchange her own.

Pity him then when Robin's brown eyes turn to plead in vain, for Jack, now fully alive to his share of

blame in the past intercourse between them, in extenuation of his fault resolved that neither by speech nor action would he further betray his trust—the promise he had given her father, to the letter he would keep; and until he had something to offer, he would not utter a single word.

It was this resolution which made silence about his project a necessity; he felt he must not overtax his strength, which was hardly equal to more than the announcement of his departure on the day it had to be made. Whether anything or nothing came of his letter, he would leave Venice. So far, that was settled; the point at issue was, what should he find to do?

Each time he was near the post—and how many excuses he found to be in its neighborhood—he went in to ask if anything had come for him, to be told, "No," until his heart sickened; and then, when hope had dwindled very low and the question seemed scarcely worth putting, a letter was handed to him which he had opened, read, and read again, without any distinct notion of its contents beyond the fact that his steps were keeping time to a voice which sang, "It's all right, all right; he has found something for me to do!" The something—connected with a banking transaction at Bucharest—was, as Jack knew in after days, a difficulty invented by Mr. Clarkson for the occasion. The good friend desired to test the faith of the prodigal, who was to start on his mission immediately he received the letter.

This meant leaving Venice without delay; and having ascertained that a train went out that night at eleven o'clock, Jack, who, influenced by that unacknowledged superstition which discourages preparation, had left everything to be done, found himself fully occupied until late in the afternoon, when he went to the Verikers' hotel to announce his departure to his friends.

"I've had an answer to my letter; it's all right—I am leaving here this evening."

While Jack spoke, his eyes had been wandering

round the room. Robin was not there. Mr. Veriker was sitting alone.

"Well, Jack," he said, with a deep-drawn sigh, "I suppose I ought to say I'm glad, but I can't—it sticks in my throat somehow. You know, though, don't you? —that it's all right—that I'm glad you're satisfied, sorry as I am to lose you?"

"Come, it was you who set me on to it," said Jack, hoping to brighten him. "I don't believe I should ever have written, but for what you said to me."

"No—wouldn't you? I hope it will turn out well, then. It's about the only good advice I ever did give, so it ought to succeed."

"I hope so, and I think it will."

With the rebound of youth, Jack was all impatience to be gone; the sooner he went, the sooner would he begin that battle by which Robin was to be won.

"He's a first-rate old fellow who has given me a hand."

"Not the uncle, then, you once spoke of?"

"No, I didn't write to him—he's done with me, I think; was going to get married when last I heard."

"Ah! that's what you'll be doing I dare say—as soon as you're settled down respectably. You'll forget all about us, I expect; and the best thing for you, too."

Jack made no reply.

"Is Robin out?" he asked.

"No; she was here sitting by the window a minute ago—didn't you see her as you came in?"

"No; I'll go and look for her;" but before Jack could move, the door opened, and Robin appeared.

"It's Jack," said Mr. Veriker, with the haste a melancholy man is in to announce bad news; "he's come to tell us he's going away."

"Yes; is he?"

"Going away to-night. I tell him," he added, seeing that Robin stood so calm, "that he'll very soon forget all about us."

"I think—yes, I have forgotten something. I'm coming back again."

The door shut—Robin was gone.

"She'll miss you as much as anyone," said Mr. Veriker, with a nod of his head in the direction of the door. "I don't know what she'll do when you're gone."

"I hope you'll look after her," said Jack. "Go about with her more than you do—you seem," he added bitterly, "to forget that she's a child no longer, and that men don't look on her as such." Then, after a minute's pause, "You haven't heard, have you, from the relations you wrote to, yet?"

Mr. Veriker shook his head.

"They'll never trouble themselves to answer," he said. "I might have known that before I sent the letter—only drowning men catch at straws."

"Well, it does not matter so much now," and Jack smiled cheerily; "only, while I think of it, I may as well give you an address which will find me at any time—of course I shall write; but in case of anything happening, you know:" and he wrote on a piece of paper a direction which he folded up and gave to Mr. Veriker. "There, take care of it," he said; "that will always fetch me; and now I think I'll go and look after Robin."

"Oh, she'll be back in a minute. You're not in any hurry to go yet, are you?"

"Well, I have not very long to stay; besides, I want to ask her about something which she can tell me;" and he went out into the passage, off from which was Robin's room.

Already the sound of his footsteps brought her to meet him, and taking within his her little cold hands, he stopped her, saying as he did so:

"You haven't asked me where I'm going, Robin."

"You're going away," she said simply. What mattered place or distance, so they had to part?

"Well, but I've gone away before, haven't I?"

"Yes."

"And I have come back again. Haven't I always come back to you again, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then why should I not come back now? Listen. I mean to come as soon as ever I possibly can. You believe me, don't you?"

"Yes," she faltered, and the splash splash of the tears, which were falling on his hands, came faster than before. "Only, I don't feel we shall ever be the same—not Jack and Robin—never, never, never!" and the eyes that looked up big with tears made such a tender appeal, that Jack's strength all but gave way —he must gather her in his arms and set her heart at ease by telling her she had his love.

Fortunately for his resolve, the opening of a door recalled him to his senses.

"Oh, that's right, you're not gone yet;" it was Mr. Veriker who spoke. "What do you say to our seeing you off—going to the station with you? Eh, Robin, shall we? You'd like to, wouldn't you?"

"It was just what I was asking her to do," said Jack, tightening his hold of her hands in the effort at recovery.

"Then we'll go. We've been all in the downs both of us to-day, so it will cheer us up to see the last of the only friend we have left."

Jack was already at the foot of the stairs.

"Here, I say, don't go off like that; how are we to meet? what steps are you starting from?"

Mr. Veriker hurried along to get a reply to his question, but when he returned to tell the hour and place to Robin, she was nowhere to be found.

Perhaps Mr. Veriker felt some suspicion of his daughter's secret; any way, when later on Robin made her appearance, he made no remark on her flushed cheeks and swollen eyes, but launched out into the reasons Jack had for going away, and the prospects which no doubt would open out before him; and

growing more oracular as he talked, he gave it as his opinion that Jack was one who would go far, soon find his place in the world, and make his fortune.

"So good-bye to any more of him that you or I will ever see, Robin. I know how it is—it has all happened to me a score of times before. It isn't their fault; they mean to keep it up, but after a few letters, a little time goes by, and then by degrees, or suddenly, altogether, the whole acquaintance comes to an end."

Robin gave an assenting nod—it was the easiest way of dismissing the question; besides notwithstanding her wish to defend Jack, the words her father spoke seemed to find an echo in her heart, over which a gathered load of unshed tears lay heavy.

* * * * * *

What a mercy is the bustle of departure! Under its shelter how many farewell agonies are hidden.

A rapid glance at Robin's tear-stained face had photographed itself in Jack's memory. Those wistful eyes, filled with unbidden tears, which gathered, rolled slowly down, and fell unheeded, came between him and all he looked at.

Mr. Veriker, in his sympathy casting prudence to the winds, had seated himself near the gondolier. It was best for the luggage, would keep the boat trim, besides which he wanted the fellow to give them a song.

Jack had the place by Robin. Hidden in the darkness of those narrow highways, through which their course to the railway had to be taken, who could see them? Drowned in the sound of song and plash of water, who could hear them? Surely now he will speak; say something, if but a word, to show her that her fancy is not led astray, that he holds her different now to when he used to pet, tease, scold her! Has he not in reproof told her that she was grown into a woman?—then is she not one for him?

"Oh, Jack——" as the words rise to her lips she

turns her face full on him, plunges her eyes into his, as if to drag the secret from out his heart, and for an instant searching there they stay—to turn and drop their gaze into the waters they are passing through; for the knell is sounded to her hopes, by Jack's murmured:

"Poor child, poor Robin."

And very soon, it seemed, the station was reached, and there were some Italians there they knew, and there was a great bustle and noise of leave-taking, in the midst of which she and Jack said good-bye.

And now he had started, was gone, and they were on their way back again, her father by her side, sitting in Jack's place, his head sunk on his breast, all his gay humor vanished. And she—Robin—shed no tears now; they were all frozen up, and lay like a stone on the sepulchre of her love; and as the gondolier's song fell on her ear, she sighed, for the words ran:

> "Voria saver che prova più dolore,
> L'omo che parte o la dona che resta.
> Dona che resta, aresta con dolore,
> L'omo che parte trova' n' altro amore."

CHAPTER V.

DURING the month which followed Jack Dorian's departure, several letters had come from him—three in the first fortnight, and after the lapse of a week another, which still waited a reply. Strangely enough Robin, who during any of Jack's former absences had been ready on the slightest provocation to plunge into a correspondence with him, now shirked writing—seemed to regard answering his letters as a task of which, seeing she had much to occupy her, her father might well relieve her.

"All right, then, I'll set about it to-morrow, Mr. Veriker would reply—to-morrow was always Mr. Veriker's time for doing anything he had to do—and the

morrow come, Robin, who, by some intuition always seemed to discover that the thing had not been done, would say a trifle sharply:

"If you don't write soon, dear, you may as well give up writing altogether. Jack will have left the place he was at, and the letter won't reach him."

"Then like a good girl sit down and write the letter yourself; then it will be done without any more delay."

But no; in this Robin would not be persuaded. She had something to make, something to mend, something which would occupy her time too fully to leave any leisure for writing to Jack.

She did not say that since he had left them she had commenced a hundred letters to him; each one torn up and scattered to the winds, because in her desire to sting she was conscious of betraying a bitterness which she strove in vain not to discover. The cruel certainty that Jack had but amused himself—still regarding her as a plaything—had curdled Robin's fresh love, and left her filled with the desire to stab, wound, give pain in some way to him who had made her so cruelly suffer.

She was but a few months past seventeen—age when Sorrow's hand strikes so sharply, and Time's healing comes so swiftly.

Unluckily, too, situated as they were just now, there was nothing in her life to distract her. The bathing season over, the Italians whom they had known were gone away; and among the many travelers who came, there was no one whom they knew.

Accustomed to see her father easy, gay and overflowing with good spirits, Robin could not reconcile herself to the change which had come over him. He who had ever sought pleasure, and found distraction in every form of excitement, seemed now incapable of being amused by anything or anybody. In place of the old rattle of jest and small-talk, which, poured out between him and Robin, had made the hours when they were together have wings, he would sit silent and

gloomy, only making an effort to speak when his daughter's questions obliged him to give a reply. He would beg her to go out, and grow impatient at being left alone; would propose a walk, and find some excuse why she should go one way and he another.

At her wits'-end to know the cause of the change, Robin was fain to set it down to the dull life they were leading; but when she proposed going away, Mr. Veriker saw no reason for leaving. On the contrary, there were times when he spoke of spending the winter at Venice, and the very next day perhaps he talked of packing up, and being off before the week was out. Nothing pleased him, suited him, satisfied him; and in place of that unruffled temper, and the easy good-humor which had smoothed all difficulties and gained him a hundred friends, he was sharp, irritable, and had fits of anger such as Robin had never seen him give way to before. Life for both of them seemed to have changed its hue; it had been rose-colored, it was now gray: a mist obscured the sun, clouds had overcast the sky—happiness had taken flight, Jack had gone away.

One morning after Robin had been taking a stroll in the public gardens, and had come to fetch her father, so that they might go out for their dinner as usual, she surprised him reading a telegram which for a moment he seemed inclined to hide, and then held out towards her.

"A surprise for you," he said; "somebody is coming—here—to see us."

"Somebody!'

The world only contained one *somebody* for Robin; and the blood which had rushed to her heart, mounted up and flooded her neck and face, so that though her eyes were on the words, the letters danced before them.

"Christopher Blunt," she said at length. "Christopher Blunt," she repeated dreamily. "*Who* is Christopher Blunt, papa? I never heard the name."

"Oh yes! yes! you have," said Mr. Veriker hastily;

"it's the man who married your poor mother's sister. They offered to take you when she died, and adopt you as their own child. You've often heard me speak of it in days gone by."

"Of course I remember now," said Robin, becoming alive to the labored way in which her father was speaking, and noticing that he had been lying down on the sofa, on which he was still half reclining, that his necktie was loosened, and that there was a strong smell of ether in the room. "Have you not been well, papa?"

"Not quite; nothing much; a little faint—it's been a hot day, I think."

"But you seemed all right when I went away."

"Well, my dear, so I was, but I can't sign an agreement to always remain as you leave me. I wish I could. Have you read what he says?"

Robin had been going over the words this time with understanding, and a gradual comprehension of what they were meant to convey.

"*From* CHRISTOPHER BLUNT, Verona,

To ASTON VERIKER, Hotel Bregno, Venice.

"Leave here to-morrow; reach Venice by evening train. Please meet me at station."

"Why that means to-night," she said, running her eyes back to the date of despatch. "It was sent yesterday; how is it we didn't get it, I wonder?"

"Well, that I mean to inquire about; the fellow who brought it only knew that he had been told to deliver it. Considering how they manage their affairs here, the wonder is we've ever had it at all."

Mr. Veriker was trying, while letting his lips speak, to arrange what more he should say to Robin. She on her part, paying no heed to his words, was thinking what could possibly be bringing this man to see them.

"Isn't it very odd his coming?—You dislike him so, don't you? Have you any idea why it is?"

"Why it is I dislike him? Oh, my ideas are perfectly clear on that score, certainly;" and he gave a little laugh which experience had taught his daughter was meant to conceal a certain shiftiness of answer.

"I thought you'd know that was not what I meant," she said gravely; "only it seems so odd for a person with whom you have had nothing to do for years, to all at once send a telegram like this, that I fancied you might have written, or have had a letter from him perhaps."

"No, that is the only communication I have had from him; what he has in his head by coming I know no more than you do."

"Shall you go to the station?"

"Decidedly I shall. Who knows?—he may be going to make us heirs to his property."

"Not likely—he has a son, hasn't he?"

"He had. Look here, Bobby! perhaps he may have come to ask your hand in marriage for him."

Robin gave a contemptuous little "H'm. He might have spared himself the trouble, then."

"Why?" said her father; "you must marry some day."

"Some day—that is very far off, then."

"I don't know that—it would be a very great ease to my mind to see you provided for. Think, if I had to leave you, how friendless you would be."

"Leave me! How leave me?"

Mr. Veriker looked up and the eyes of the father and daughter met, and in an instant they were locked in each others arms, their faces wetted by each other's tears.

"Father, father! don't talk like that—whom have I left me in the world but you?"

The shadow had come so near that, for the first time, Robin had perceived it, and something within her whispered that its name was death.

CHAPTER VI

MANY years had passed since Mr. Veriker and Mr. Blunt had met—years in which the one man had mounted Fortune's ladder with as much ease as the other had slipped down it. They had married sisters, the one bond of union between them, if that can be called union which is the origin and motive-power of dissension; for Mr. Veriker, unmindful of a sacrifice which had been chiefly made to afford a home for the girl he had taken as wife, began by the determination to separate her as effectually as possible from those who belonged to her.

Necessity does not demand the details which made Robina Hamilton marry Mr. Blunt. Suffice it to say that at the time he made his offer, she and her sister Alice were living on the charity of those who made the bread of dependence very bitter. Mr. Blunt, a self-made man, who had risen from workman to master, was uneducated, middle-aged, and a widower, but he was able to offer independence; and mightiest of all the arguments in his favor there would be a home to give to Alice, her young sister. Robina Hamilton seemed to have come into the world to sacrifice her inclinations to the interests of others, therefore, when she saw that the welfare of the being dearest to her would be furthered by her marriage, she set her personal scruples on one side and hesitated no longer.

From the hour of this contemplated marriage, and through all the years after, Mrs. Blunt lived the life of a martyr; her sensitive nature revolting against, her refinement outraged by, the man whom she had vowed to honor. But from her conduct she allowed no one ever to guess this; and when, in due time, Alice became the wife of Mr. Veriker, and it was apparent that he intended to withdraw from any intimacy which entailed the companionship of Mr. Blunt, Robina sacrificed the love she bore her sister to the obedience she

had promised to render to her husband. Before undertaking her duties she had examined their requirements, and now that she was put to the test her strength was not wanting.

Perhaps her greatest trial was in being forced to listen to the indignation of Mr. Blunt, indignation the more bitter because it was he who had most furthered this marriage, for the tumult—caused by seeing Alice unjustly treated—over, Mrs. Blunt could not give her hearty approval of Mr. Veriker, who, in spite of his good looks and fascinating manners, was not the husband she would have chosen for her sister.

But in this her better judgment was over-ruled; Alice would not believe it possible that her lover could have a fault, and Mr. Blunt, with the unacknowledged desire of being brother-in-law to a man who was cousin to a lord, shut his eyes to everything but the fact that Mr. Veriker's name was to be found in the "Peerage."

But unluckily before long Mr. Veriker's name was also to be found in the bankruptcy list, and then it was that revenge came sweet.

Mr. Blunt would listen to no appeal. *He* lend *his* money to a fellow who had turned up his nose at him! not if he knew it, he wouldn't. No, no! let him go to his cousins, Lord this or Lord that, and see what they thought of him; he thought him a swindler, a vagabond, a cheat who had entered the house of an honest man and imposed himself on a respectable family, and so he'd tell him if ever the opportunity was given him. And the opportunity being given him a scene of recrimination took place, which separated the two men forever; it even divided the sisters; and the Verikers soon after taking flight from England, Mrs. Blunt had to call up all the fortitude she could muster, in order to bear the burden she had imposed on herself.

There was one duty attached to her sad lot which very soon became a pleasure. Her husband had a son—a boy of six or seven—whose birth had made Mr. Blunt a widower. The child had come late in his

married life after years of desire, as if Fortune, having begun to shower gifts, could not stay her hand from bestowing anything he asked of her.

But in their fulfillment wishes sometimes entail an undreamed-of penalty; in this case it was the death of his wife, a weak, sickly woman for whom he never had seemingly cared much, but who left a vacant place in his heart which no one else could ever fill, for she had been his early choice, the partner of his struggles, the companion in his difficulties.

Through the whole period of her expectancy the poor wife felt her joy over-shadowed by the dread of her coming end, but she never allowed her fears to be suspected by her husband; and when with life ebbing fast away she pointed to the child and tried to smile, a rush of tenderness such as he had never felt before mastered the strong man, and he offered God back the child he had coveted, if in exchange He would spare him the wife he had never valued.

To see, therefore, Robina make this boy the object of her maternal care gave her a hold on Mr. Blunt that nothing else could have effected; and when some years later, at great risk to herself, she nursed little Christopher through a terrible fever, and by her devotion saved his life, although Mr. Blunt said little, he registered a solemn vow, that ask what she might, he would not deny her.

But Mrs. Blunt was not a woman to make demands, and a very long time went by ere her husband was called on to redeem his—to her—unknown pledge.

That sudden exodus of the Verikers from England had seemed their starting-point of downfall; from that time they were constantly in difficulties, sometimes at home, sometimes abroad—now sinking, now swimming—within an ace of making a fortune, on the very brink of ruin.

In vain did Robina urge all she could think of, and often more than even to herself she could justify, in Mr. Veriker's defence; but of what use advancing the

plea of extravagant habits to a man who had contrived to save on a pound a week? how could she echo the lament that it was impossible to live on three hundred a year when Mr. Blunt had thought himself passing rich on less than half that sum?

Tender heart! she did the best she could, and by saving, pinching, and denying herself in every way, she contrived from time to time to send her sister some substantial proof of her love, more especially after a little girl was born, to whom they made her godmother, and gave the name of Robina.

This child was six years old when, after an illness of short duration, the news came of her mother's death, and then it was that Mrs. Blunt made her appeal, and Mr. Blunt granted her request. A letter was sent to Mr. Veriker, offering to take the child, and, with the understanding that he would make no later claim on her, adopt her as their daughter.

The request—in the making of which Mr. Blunt insisted on putting in a word here and there—came to a bowed-down, sorrow-stricken man. Mr. Veriker in spite of all the follies by which he had tried her, worshipped his wife with a lover-like devotion to the end; the child she had borne him was as the apple of his eye.

Resign this, his only treasure, to those who, besides stealing her love from him, would bring her up to hate and despise her father! No! rather would he jump into the river with her; and his gall being stirred by their wish to rob him of all that remained of that wife so dear, he flung back his refusal worded with so much disdain and bitterness, that it was impossible for a time that Mrs. Blunt should ask her husband to reconsider the subject.

Later on she wrote herself, but no reply came. Another, and another letter, begging for news of the child, remained unanswered. What was to be done? The question was more than ever before her mind when an illness prostrated her, which at an

unexpected moment took a fatal turn, and she rapidly sank—but not before she had said to her husband in presence of his son Christopher:

"Promise to remember that Alice's child is my god-child, and that her name is Robina."

Seven years had gone by between the night when those words were spoken and the morning when Mr. Veriker's letter brought them back to Mr. Blunt's memory, but the impression they had made was not worn out, and the telegram just received was the result of their influence.

CHAPTER VII.

SEEING that if Mr. Blunt was to be met at the station there was no time left for delay, Mr. Veriker hastily sought to restore his daughter's composure by laughing at her fears, and declaring that except for a little faintness which he could perfectly account for, he felt as well as he ever had felt in his life.

"Upon my word," he said, "I don't know what people would say of two silly geese who can't take a joke without flinging themselves into one another's arms. I don't know which deserves a whipping most, you or I."

Robin smiled. The shadow past, she wondered herself why she had been struck with such sudden fear.

"But you looked so," she said, "I couldn't help it, papa."

"Bless my soul! I must take care not to look like that again, at least not to-night, or I may have old Blunt's sixteen-stone weight on my neck."

"Oh, he's a big man, is he?" said Robin.

"Big!" said Mr. Veriker, puffing out his cheeks and swelling himself into an attitude of great importance. "In his own estimate there isn't a street in England wide enough for him to walk down. The Grand

Canal may serve him, but nothing narrower, depend on that."

"What are you going to do with him, papa?"

"That depends on what he wishes to be done with. It's time, however, I set off to see, or the train will be in, and he will be off, and I shan't be there."

He talked while re-arranging his collar and necktie, hoping to divert his daughter's attention from his movements. He had decided to go to the station, but the effort to get there was costing him more than even to himself he cared to own.

"If she were only out of the room, I should get on better," he thought, oppressed by the desire to draw a deep breath, and stopped by the certain recurrence of a sharp stab of pain, which, when it came, had forced him to cry out.

"Robin, what if you were to go as far as the steps and see if you could find Paolo? I'll follow directly after."

Robin threw on her hat; in an instant she had gone. Paolo was waiting there, and she secured him and his gondola.

"It's all right; I've got him," she called out as soon as she caught sight of her father, and running to meet him, she turned and walked by his side. "I'd best look after myself about dinner, hadn't I? You're most likely to go off somewhere with him, and if not, you'll come back at once, I suppose?"

"Of couse I shall," Mr. Veriker managed to say.

Distressed as he was by this indescribable sense of suffering, the mere giving utterance to a word was a labor. He had felt nothing like this since the night when he had spoken to Jack Dorian, and a presentiment haunted him that at sight of his old enemy a similar spasm would attack him. The bare supposition of that agony brought out a damp sweat upon his forehead; a trembling seized upon his limbs. Overcome by a sickening nervousness that he could not master, he made a stop.

"After all," he said, drawing in his breath as if seized with a sudden pain, "I shan't be able to go and meet this man. For Heaven's sake, my dear, don't look at me like that" (Robin had turned on him a face filled with alarm): "it's nothing but a passing distress, which I hoped some brandy that I took before coming out would have set straight, but it hasn't done so."

"Whatever shall we do, papa?"

"Do? Oh! why you must go instead of me, that's all. Tell him I came as far as here, but I didn't feel well and couldn't get on; and that I want to know where he means to stop, so that I may see him either to-night, or the first thing to-morrow morning."

Robin hailed Paolo, and made a sign to him that she was ready.

"And I was going to say," added Mr. Veriker, "if he begins asking any questions about me, remember that you don't know anything. Say that I said so, but that I would explain everything to him. You understand?"

Robin assented.

It was not the first time such a caution had been given her.

"You're safe to spot him," continued her father—"big, fat, pompous-looking, with a red face, and Britisher marked on every line of it."

"I'll find him out," she said, searching in her pocket for a coin to bestow on the old fellow who was holding the boat. "And afterwards I'll come back as soon as ever I can."

"Let Paolo wait and bring you back, unless you see that you can be of any service. You know I want you to edge yourself into the old brute's good graces. Don't forget to let him know that you're called Robin after your aunt Robina, and—here, I say," for she was already taking her seat, "while you're there, suppose you make a stretch, and see how it sounds to call him uncle."

"Uncle!" cried Robin, with a little gesture of

contempt. "Come, I like that;" and her fears being lightened by this seeming return of her father's usual manner, she kissed her hand, showing a smiling, bright face, as the boat pushed off and away.

The moon was beginning to rise—its slender cresset hung in a cloudless sky, yet in the narrow canals through which their way led, the light had long ago died out. Except for the swish of water when something went swiftly by, not a sound disturbed the silence, and Robin, who at starting had been busily arranging what she would do and say, gradually forgot the object of her present journey, and let creep into her mind the recollections of the last time she had gone that way; how Paolo had taken them then; how her father had made him sing, and, without seeming to listen to the song, Jack had sat by her side.

Leaned back, hidden in the darkness, Robin let her tears flow fast—flow out of pity for her own sad case: she was so young to have her love thrown back upon herself, so friendless, so desolate, for, although unacknowledged, even in thought, the chill of that shadow she had seen hovering near her father still ran cold within her, and its icy presence had ousted out love to fill its place by a great yearning after sympathy. Oh for an ear into which she could pour her troubles! a breast on which she could sob out her sorrow! Involuntarily her arms were stretched out, only to fall listlessly down a moment later, for who was there now to answer that appeal? Jack had left her, Jack had forsaken her.

The raised voice of Paolo, as with a dexterous movement he shot his gondola into the very midst of noise and bustle, roused Robin from her dreaming. They were nearing the station, passing the Ca d'Oro, whose front shone here and there in flecks of light. The struggle to push ahead warned them that they had no time to spare, and the sound of the near approaching train was heard as Robin began to mount the station steps.

"Big, fat, pompous," she found herself repeating, as some minutes later she stood viewing the individual travelers who, in all the wild confusion of a foreign arrival, seemed to crowd round and pass before her. Englishmen there were, and in very respectable numbers too, but not one among them in any way answering to that description.

"He can't have come," she thought, giving a sigh of relief as she retraced her steps back from a scrutiny which had extended to the very end carriage of the train; "they have all gone—that is, nearly all," for her attention was at that minute drawn to a young man whom she had passed before, but without taking any notice of him—perhaps she would not have noticed him now, but that as her glance fell on him he turned abruptly away, making it apparent that he had been watching her.

Either to save himself embarrassment, or that he had really a question to put, he left his luggage standing while he stepped over to speak to a porter—an opportunity seized by Robin to crane her neck as she passed by and read the letters, which, painted white on his Gladstone bag, stood no doubt as the initials of the bashful owner. "C. B."

Her voice confirmed what her eyes had seen, and then her face in turn grew very red, for she had spoken aloud, and the young man had heard her.

"I beg your pardon," she stammered· "but I am trying to find some one."

"Are you? So am I," and he stopped.

"You're not Mr. Blunt, are you?"

"Yes, I am—is your name Veriker?'

"I am Robin Veriker."

"What! Mr. Veriker's daughter? I am Mr. Blunt's son."

"Oh, that accounts for it, then; I was looking for your father;" and they both shook hands, took a little survey of each other, and then laughed rather shyly.

"Isn't Mr. Blunt with you?" asked Robin.

"No; he never intended coming. Mr. Veriker has had his letter, hasn't he?"

"I don't think so; he was very surprised when he got the telegram—it only reached us this evening—and thinking it was your father, he wondered rather what was bringing him."

"Oh!—ah, yes!"

Mr. Veriker's letter had warned them that his state of health was not known to his daughter. Christopher now guessed that the appeal he had made had been also kept from her.

"I shall have all that to explain to him. I hope he is well."

"No, not quite, he isn't or he would have come himself to meet you. He did attempt it, but he was obliged to go back—it has been very hot. I dare say you have felt it to-day, traveling. Have you anything besides what is here?"

"No; this is all."

"Then shall we go?

She led the way, Christopher following her.

"I have a gondola waiting for me," she said, as they went down. "I don't know what you are going to do, but can I take you anywhere?"

"Oh! thank you, I———" and he hesitated.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Well, frankly, I thought your father would have arranged for me. Evidently the letter has gone astray; it's only a question of an hotel, though. To which shall I go? Can you decide for me?"

"There are lots of hotels, only—I—was thinking whether perhaps it wouldn't be best to ask papa. I could run up to him while you waited at the steps—it's no distance; I shouldn't keep you."

"Would it be troubling him?—perhaps it would if he is not well, and it does not in the least matter. I don't care where I am put, so long as I am not far off from you."

"I wish I could ask you to come to us," Robin said,

her face growing a little rosy, "but I dare say you know that we are not very well off, and our hotel is one of those where English people never go. It is kept by an Italian—you know the sort of place. It would not suit you in the least, I feel certain of that."

"I wish you would let me try," said Christopher; "I am not at all difficult to please, and my object in coming was to see as much of you as I possibly could."

"Was it?" Robin's look betrayed her surprise. "Did you only come to see us, then?"

"That was all. It seems to astonish you.

"It does rather, because, you know, I have been used to think we were great enemies."

"But you don't think so now?"

She shook her head.

"No, I don't. Come along; we will go and ask papa;" and turning, she said something to the porter, adding to Christopher, "I've told him to take on your luggage and hail the gondola."

CHAPTER VIII.

COMING from under the covered station out on the steps, Christopher's bewildered senses seemed lost in amazement. The scene which lay before him was so unlike anything he had ever looked upon, that he could scarce persuade himself it was not the conjured-up art of some magician's wand, and, following Robin, he elbowed his way through the crowd, and got into the gondola like one in a dream.

The wondrous grandeur of that line of palaces, shown by the moon's pale light, in all their majesty; the glitter of a thousand twinkles reflected on the surface of that glassy water; the weird, fantastic boats passing, crossing, shooting ahead of each other, guided by the strange cries of the gondoliers—all was new to Christopher, who felt each moment a fresh demand made on his interest and attention.

"How wonderful," he said, "all this seems to me!"

"Why, have you never been here before?" asked Robin.

"Never—I was going to say I had never been abroad before; but once, during the Exhibition, I went with my father to Paris—coming so far as this was quite an undertaking for me."

Robin turned on him a look of inquiry.

"Are you wondering," he said, with a half-amused smile, "what made me come so far?"

"Well, yes;" and she blushed and laughed, adding quickly, "but you need not tell me if it is anything to do with papa, because it might be about business which he would not care for me to know. Men get mixed up with such a lot of things," she continued by way of explanation, "betting and racing and playing, that, to my mind, girls are best out of altogether."

For a moment Christopher was a little taken aback.

"I'm very glad to hear you say so," he said gravely. "I have a horror of gambling myself."

"Have you? Oh, I haven't a bit, if one was only always able to win—it's the losing I hate. Papa hadn't any decent luck at all last year. I don't fancy we shall go to Monaco this season;" she made a little pause. "He does not seem well," she said thoughtfully; "his spirits are not the same—I can't think why. You don't know any reason, do you?"

"Oh, I suffer dreadfully from low spirits myself, without any reason at all," said Christopher evasively; "that is why this change may do me good, and it might be the same with your father. If I could persuade him to come to England, what would you say?"

"Say he wasn't to go without me."

The earnestness of her words made Christopher smile.

"You would not consent to be parted from him then," he said jestingly.

"Parted! that was what you wanted to do once before," she said fiercely, "to part us, and I have hated

you for it ever since; and I shall hate you a thousand times more if you try now in any way to attempt it."

"That is right! I am very glad to hear you say so. No, no—believe me, very far from my mind is it to wish to separate you and your father."

The sympathy in his voice touched Robin; and the tears, which for the last few hours had lain very close to her eyes, welled over and fell in a quick shower.

"I don't know what is the matter with me to-day," she said, struggling to regain composure. "I seem to be ready to laugh or cry if anyone but holds up his finger to me—I'm not always quite so foolish, you know, but—he isn't well—that—I can see; and—if you are only two, it does make such a difference, doesn't it? You haven't anyone but a father, have you?"

"No; I have lost my mother—that is, the one who was a mother to me—your aunt, Robina. It was she who told me about you, who used to talk of you, who gave me the desire to see the one who was named after her."

Robin nodded her head—she could not trust herself to speak just then, and they went on in silence. Out of the Grand Canal they had now turned into one of the narrow passages in the midst of darkness, with all around hushed and still.

Gliding swiftly, stealthily on, they seemed like shadows who have left life's shore to "shape their course into the silent land." The thought came to Christopher, and there ran through him a little shiver.

"You are cold," said Robin, as they shot out into the light again; "but here we are close to the steps now, there in front, do you see? I won't keep you any time while I run up—if you don't mind, I think it would be best that I should first speak to papa."

She was soon in the Calle S. Moisè and across the bridge, close to which stood their unpretending hotel. Her father was upstairs in his room, the door of which she pushed gently open and entered.

"Better?" she asked anxiously, as she tiptoed in.

"Right as a nine-pin; I knew I should be. Well, what about him?—has he come?"

"Yes; I've hooked my fish and am waiting to land him. Such fun at the station; it's the greatest wonder I did not miss him! It's the son, not the father—the father never meant to come."

"Never meant to come!"

Mr. Veriker sat suddenly upright so that he might face his daughter.

"Do you mean that we're to be spared the old ruffian altogether?"

"Yes. He thought you knew. He says they sent you a letter?"

"When did they send me a letter?"

"I don't know; but we mustn't stop to talk about that now, because he's waiting—he wants to know if he can't come here and be with us altogether."

"But certainly bring him to me—let me clasp him to my beating heart!"

"Yes; but think of what the house is like, papa—be serious, now, do."

"Never more so, my dear. I'm only dying to hug the fellow like a bear, for joy that he hasn't turned out to be his old father. Joking apart, though, I see no reason on earth why he shouldn't come. What's he like, eh?" and the screw up he gave to his face showed that the opinion he had formed was by no means flattering to Christopher.

"No! he's not a bit like that," said Robin promptly. "Perhaps you wouldn't pick him out for looking like a gentleman, but it would never enter your mind to think him vulgar. I like him so far, and if"—and she let her eyes wander round—"you think it would do, I should like him to come here."

"Off you go and bring him back with you, then. Hang it all, if a Veriker can put up with the place, it's good enough for a Blunt any day!"

The life into which Christopher Blunt was about to

plunge was as new to him as though an Icelander should be suddenly dropped down into the heart of Africa.

For years the word "home" in the sense of social intercourse and family ties, had for him had no meaning. It was true that he and his father inhabited one house together, but they would have been bound closer to each other had fifty miles separated them. They had not a taste, an idea, a thought, in common. Mr. Blunt's one aim in life had been to get on, his pride to be counted a cute fellow. Success had so far rewarded his efforts that he was now a rich man with —strange as it sounds, but more common than it appears—the experience that it is sometimes easier to make money than it is to spend it.

Not content to remain where his eyes were constantly caught by the rungs of the ladder by which he had mounted, some few years before he had purchased an estate on which he had gone to live, under the idea of setting himself up as a county magnate. Why not? He had always ranked people according to the riches with which they were surrounded, and if he lived in the biggest house, kept the most servants, and drove the best horses, surely he would be entitled to a corresponding amount of consideration.

So in prospect of the position he was about to assume, he had, to quote his own statement, the place put in thorough repair, the gardens arranged after the most approved fashion, and the house done up to the standard of decorative perfection, "to look as if no money had been spared upon it," and having altered the old place—the dwelling of a family who had held it for generations—into an eyesore to all the surrounding neighborhood, Mr. Blunt, in all the pomp of pride and glory, came down and took up his abode there, and was furious because nobody showed any disposition to welcome him. Some few called, others took no notice; the rector did not entertain, the squire was always away, and though some years had

now elapsed since he came to Wadpole, but very little progress towards further intimacy had been effected.

As is natural in such a condition, Mr. Blunt sought every cause but the real one; his most fixed idea being that the house needed a mistress, his son Christopher must marry. Easy enough to say, and in the case of most young men with such prospects, easy enough to carry out; but unfortunately for the speedy accomplishment of his father's desires, young Christopher was shy, retiring, and sensitive to a degree.

Fully alive to the ostentation and vulgar display which delighted his father, the son winced under the contempt he saw it drew forth, and nothing would induce him to thrust himself among persons whose cold toleration humiliated him with the sense of a false position. Added to this, he bore the burden of constitutionally delicate health, a misfortune which but added strength to Mr. Blunt's wishes. Unwilling to acknowledge that anything belonging to him could labor under defect or imperfection, he attributed his son's frequent indispositions to the way he had been brought up.

"It's been overdone," he said; "he's had too much care, he's been completely mollycoddled; he wants a spice of the devil put into him."

And with Mr. Veriker's letter in his hand, the thought came of what a past master in that art was the man from whom this letter had come. Christopher, while speaking of the Verikers, had let drop a wish to see Italy, and above all to see Venice. Why not let him go? It was an opportunity which might not occur again.

"What do you say," he said, "to setting off at once and sifting out how much truth there is in what he says here?"

Christopher caught at the suggestion. Since the death of his stepmother, he had been possessed with a great desire to find out the child who had lain so close to her heart.

"You'll write and tell them to expect me," he said before starting.

"But I shan't know when you'll get there—not the exact day, I shan't."

"Oh, I'll send a telegram to tell them that; but you prepare them—I can't bear dropping down on people unawares."

"All right," said the father, and he nodded his head in farewell, adding inwardly, "and that's just what I want you to do, my boy; never give the devil the chance of getting his boots on, or he'll take good care his cloven foot don't meet your eye.'

CHAPTER IX.

IF the art of making people feel at ease consists in being thoroughly at ease one's self, it was an utter impossibility for anyone to suffer constraint in Mr. Veriker's presence, and the greeting he gave to Christopher, although it fell short of the metaphor he had indulged in, was sufficiently warm to do away with all embarrassment between them. Induced by the tender solicitations of Robin, which were backed by the half-shy entreaties of Christopher, Mr. Veriker consented to make the effort to try and go out so that they might have dinner together.

"To the Caffè Quadri," Robin suggested. "A table in the window, so that we can hear the band play."

"Come on then, let's be off," said Mr. Veriker. "Christopher, you must be our guest, and Robin shall order the dinner for us—we always make her caterer for the mess."

"Then as you will want to walk slowly, papa, wouldn't it be best for me to run on, then we shan't be kept waiting so long, you know?"

"And give you an opportunity of bamboozling Erasmo, your favorite waiter?"

"Certainly, if I can get as much by it as we used at the Lido;" and a sudden quick blush overspread her face, which had not died away when she turned and was gone.

Mr. Veriker waited for an instant until she was out of sight, and then tightening the hold he had taken of Christopher's arm he said, with an altogether altered voice, and quite a different manner:

"I wish I could tell you half the gratitude I feel to you for coming here—the idea of such a possibility never entered my head; but if I had thought for a year I couldn't have hit on anything that would have given me such complete satisfaction—the last hour seems to have made another man of me."

It was Christopher's turn to look pleased.

"I am so glad to hear you say that," he said heartily, "because all the time I had my doubts—I wondered whether you would care to see me; indeed, more than once, I said so to my father, but he pooh-poohed the idea completely, and insisted on my setting off without waiting to write the letter in which I had thought of announcing my intention."

"It was very good of your father, after all that has passed between us, to let you come; you must tell him from me that I said so."

"Yes, but I hope you'll have an opportunity of telling him yourself."

Christopher had not been with them more than an hour, and already visions of seeing the two comfortably settled close to Wadpole were floating before him, his usual shyness—that embarrassment he was wont to feel with strangers—in this case did not seem to oppress him.

Mr. Veriker shook his head, as if there ran through him a shiver.

"No," he said, "not likely—I shall never see England again," and he choked down a rising sigh; "but that little girl of mine, when you've seen what she is, been with her, found out her ways, got to know her—

well, she won t be left so utterly friendless and desolate, that I'm certain of—— By the way," he added, interrupting Christopher, who was beginning to speak, "she knows nothing of what I wrote about; she fancies I'm not quite the thing, but of this," and he gave a vague indication that it was his heart he meant, "not a syllable. I could not bear the sight of her sorrow; it would take away every chance I have—all depends on my keeping myself quiet, you know."

"I was most careful, after what your letter said, not to give her a hint of the reason why I had come to see you," Christopher answered earnestly; "but as to her being friendless, that never could have happened, so long as those are left who owe so much to one whose name she bears."

"Ah, her aunt Robina, your step-mother, you mean; yes, she was a devoted, good creature, wasn't she? it must go with the name I suppose, for this girl is an angel—nothing short of it."

"She looks like one," said Christopher simply.

Mr. Veriker threw a quick glance on him.

"You like her look then—you're not disappointed in her?"

"Disappointed!" and Christopher smiled. "No—perhaps I had pictured to myself that she would be more like what I remember her aunt, but she is quite different to her; her face seems to me very beautiful. She is like you."

"You must tell her so," and Mr. Veriker shook Christopher's hand approvingly, "tell her you think she is like me; nothing pleases her better than to be thought like her scapegrace of a father. Come, that ought to score one on my side, oughtn't it?"

But Christopher did not answer. Out from the narrow Merceria they had passed through into the Piazza, and the novelty of the unexpected change was sufficient to account for his silence: the fantastic outlines of that marvellous Basilica, the stretch of palaces, the tall masts, the solitary Campanile—here standing

out plainly visible, there cast into shadow—filled him with wonder and amazement. Bewildered, he walked on all unmindful of something Mr. Veriker was telling him, until a sudden halt brought back his senses.

"Here we are! this is our place;" and nodding pleasantly to the occupants of the chairs through which he and Christopher had to thread their way, Mr. Veriker made for the entrance of the *café*.

The usual hour for dinner was past, and already people were beginning to congregate outside, establishing themselves to listen to the band while they chatted together over coffee and ices.

At the foot of the staircase inside the door, Erasmo, with face wreathed in smiles of welcome, was waiting to receive them and usher them up into the cheerful room, where at a raised table in her favorite end-window Robin was already seated. She had taken off her hat, and, half leaning out of the window, was trying with little pellets of bread to coax some stray pigeons on to the sill. Hearing footsteps she turned her head.

"Ah, here you are! that is right," she said. "Now then, let me arrange you. No, no, papa, not there—I am going to sit there," and she indicated the seat reserved for her father; "and this chair," and she laid her hand on the back of one near, "I thought would be nicest for——." There was an intentional pause, and then she turned her speech into, "Will you sit here?" adding before Christopher had time to accept, "What ought I to call him? I don't quite know—Christopher seems so terribly familiar; and if I say Mr. Blunt I shall think he is his father."

"Oh, I can't stand having him called Mr. Blunt," exclaimed Mr. Veriker quickly.

"But if you will—and don't mind," said Christopher, "I should think it so kind of you to call me by my Christian name."

"Shall I? Would you really like it? But if so, you must call me Robin, remember; I won't answer any longer to Miss Veriker."

"Miss Veriker!" echoed her father. "*You* Miss Veriker! why, Bobby, you were never Miss Veriker to anyone in your life."

"Hush, sir!" she said, assuming a great show of dignity; "hold your tongue, if you please! How do you know what he thinks of me? I may make a great impression on—Christopher."

Oh, the wicked twinkle which for her especial benefit he managed, unobserved by Christopher, to throw into his eye! No wonder that Robin turned quickly round and began to feign much interest in the arrival of the dinner.

Although Christopher—because he had never enjoyed a dinner so much in his life—asked permission to keep the *menu*, he had not the faintest conception of what he had been eating. He knew that dish after dish had succeeded one the other, and that over every one they had laughed and talked together, until into him there was infused a gaiety of mood and manner such as he would never have credited a sober, matter-of-fact mortal like himself with possessing. What had come to him he could not tell, but so new was the feeling, that he was oppressed by the idea that presently he should wake up to find it was all a dream, and that Robin, her father, the lights, music, people, all, had vanished.

"Try as I may, I cannot get it out of my head that I am looking at a play," he kept repeating, reluctant to leave the window out of which he and Robin were leaning.

Mr. Veriker, more at ease than he had felt for weeks, was lounging stretched out on one of the velvet-covered settees; his eyes were half closed, and without being asleep he was enjoying the sweets of repose.

"Every minute I feel down will go the curtain, and the whole thing will be over."

Robin shook her head. Novel as the scene was to Christopher, to her it had become familiar.

"Night after night," she said, "especially when the

band plays, all the people turn out, and walk up and down here."

What a motley, fantastic throng was passing to and fro before their eyes—women gaily dressed or wrapped in their black mantillas; soldiers; sailors with red caps; smartly sashed gondoliers! Christopher, fascinated, declared that he could stand there for hours.

"I feel as if I should never be tired of watching them," he said.

"I often feel so, too; and do you make up stories about them? I do. I think what some are saying and others answering—people like those for instance," and she pointed to a young girl surrounded by a small crowd of admirers, amongst whom, with a look from her eyes, a smile thrown over her shoulder, and the aid of her fan, she was managing to preserve the balance of good humor.

"I'm afraid that she is a little bit of a flirt," said Christopher, after watching her; "it looks like it by the way she is encouraging them all."

"And why shouldn't she, eh? What harm does it do?"

"*They* might tell you a great deal of harm. Suppose the poor fellows are in love with her?"

"And suppose so!"

"Well, she has but one heart to bestow, and those who don't get it may die of despair, for aught we know."

Christopher was smiling, but Robin's face had grown very serious.

"Oh, no!" she said. "Men play at being in love; it is only women who die because their hearts are broken."

"What is it that women die of?" asked Mr. Veriker, whose drowsy ear had been caught by this last sentence.

"Of colds, through being kept waiting at open windows while their fathers pretend to be sleeping," she answered promptly.

"Then come on down with you—do," and he jumped up and shook himself, adding gaily, "I'm good for a cup of coffee and a seat at the Giardino Reale, to listen to the music, while you and Christopher take a turn among the people; he's dying to find out if there are any women worth looking at, I can see."

So together the three—Mr. Veriker in the middle, with an arm through each of theirs—made their way across the Piazza in the direction of the Caffé Giardino Reale.

"You shall drop me at a table, half-way up, if we can find one, said Mr. Veriker. "I expect it's pretty full by this time, though; it's their busiest hour, ten o'clock."

Robin's eyes were darted here and there in search of the desired seat. Christopher, dazzled by the increased display of lights and the crowd of gaily-dressed people, felt hopeless; a dozen chairs might be under his very nose and he wouldn't see them.

"Here you are, papa!" exclaimed Robin, indicating a seat not too near the bustle of the wonderful pavilion, yet close enough to hear the music, and to see the throng of passers-by as they promenaded up and down. "There's only one man there, and he will be somebody for you to talk to."

"Then you two won't have anything now?" said Mr. Veriker, arranging his seat. "You're off for a turn first, and then you'll come back here? All right; I shall be a fixture till you join me;" and turning to the young Italian who occupied the near chair, he made some remark which at once plunged them into conversation, so that, when Christopher and Robin from a little distance off looked back at him, he was laughing and talking, far too engrossed to notice them.

"Don't let us go into the middle of all those people there," said Christopher. "If you don't mind it, I would so much rather look at this than at them;" and he turned towards the water, and Robin followed him.

With the reaction that had set in at sight of the

alteration in her father, her spirits had risen so that she seemed to tread the air.

"Do you know, Christopher," she burst out suddenly, "that I can hardly help throwing my arms round your neck, and giving you a great big hug? Oh, don't look so awfully afraid," for Christopher's face betrayed his astonishment. "I'm not going to do it, but I mean I feel as if I could."

"Could you?" he said softly.

"Yes, indeed; and you wouldn't wonder either, if you had seen how papa was, and how different he is since he has seen you. Well, you may guess by my crying as I did when I spoke of him to you. It was this afternoon he was talking to me, and all at once in his face there came a look, oh, so terrible! I couldn't get it out of my mind. I thought something"—and a shiver supplied the word she dared not name—"was going to happen to him, that something dreadful must be the matter with him; and now," and she clasped her hands joyfully, "I see it was only my fancy, and that what all along—before—I thought the reason is true; he was just moped to death because of having nobody to speak to."

"I'm sure I'm very glad I've come," said Christopher heartily.

"Yes, but what made you come? What put it first into your head? How did you know where to find us out? I can't fancy."

"People in business can always find out where anyone they want is, through their bankers, you know," said Christopher evasively; "and then, ever since my stepmother died, I have had it in my mind that when I grew strong enough and could do as I pleased, I should seek you out and try and get to know you—she often talked of you to me; I used to regret very much the loss of that little sister by adoption I was told it was once possible I might have had."

"How strange!" said Robin thoughtfully, "being loved and regretted by those one has never seen."

"Ah, if she had been spared, and you could have had her to go to, it would be a blessing indeed," and Christopher sighed. "Almost the last words—about anything of this world—she spoke, was to commit you to my father's care. She was very fond of you."

They had sat down on a stone seat, and with heads half turned were looking over the waters far away. The moon had newly risen; the warm haze of the summer night hung low; lights played upon the glassy surface; from beyond came the lapping of a sea that knows no rest.

"And she was very fond of you too," said Robin, breaking the silence which had succeeded Christopher's last words.

"Yes; after your mother died, I believe that you and I had the largest share of her heart; it was that which made her talk of you so much to me."

"Then we ought to care a great deal for one another, you and I?"

She had turned her face and so had he—they were looking with earnest, serious gaze the one at the other.

"It is what I want," Christopher said; and something made him add, "I am a very lonely creature: except my father, I have not a soul in the world to care for."

Robin stretched out her hand.

"I know so well what that is," she said quickly; "it is the same with me: I seem to have such a lot to give, and no one to give it to."

The words were said so despondingly that Christopher could but smile, but the smile was not one to offend Robin. Before he spoke again it was half reflected in her own face.

"Do you think it might become possible in time for you to give a little of that—love—affection to me?"

"But I think I have given it to you already; directly I saw you I felt certain I should like you, and now I am sure I shall—I do."

Christopher gave a little shake to the hand that had been put into his.

"Then it is a bargain," he said; "from this time we are sworn friends, we are to care for each other very much."

"Very much," Robin echoed—"like brother and sister," she added.

"Like brother and sister," he repeated; "and if there is anything you want, or want to have done, you'll come to me."

Robin nodded her head.

"And I am to be of service to you as well," she said, "although I can't yet tell how."

"I can," he answered, looking at her: "by letting me be of service to you, that is the greatest happiness you can give me. Make me feel that somebody in the world wants me," and he raised the hand he held as if to carry it to his lips; but before he could do so, Robin's face was leaned towards him.

"Not my hand, Christopher," she said gravely. "Kiss me."

CHAPTER X.

THAT first evening which the three spent together remained all his life fresh in Christopher's memory; it was an epoch in his existence, the birth of a new life in which he was caught by the hand of friendship on the one side, and beckoned by the finger of love on the other. Years after he could repeat and go over every trifling detail that had taken place, and the magic of Venice seen by him then, abided with him forever.

When they got back to their hotel, and Robin had left them, Christopher expected that he should hear some further explanations, but after two or three cursory remarks which served only to make light of his former fears, Mr. Veriker altogether avoided the subject. His anxiety relieved, his pains gone, back had

come his old flow of high spirits, and he rattled on from one thing to the other until Christopher had to plead that the fatigue of the journey was beginning to tell upon him, and that in spite of his inclination to stay, he felt it would be wiser to go off to bed.

"Quite right," said Mr. Veriker, "for I heard by what she said at parting that you've got your day cut out and dried for you to-morrow. Thank heaven! I've done with sightseeing; no more palaces, and churches, and galleries for me. I leave to Robin the honor of doing cicerone—she's young and has the energy for it."

"And the good-nature, too," said Christopher, "only I must take care not to let her overtire herself about it."

"Oh, no fear of that with a gondola to take you where you want to go: besides you musn't do too much at a time; there'll be no need to hurry. Now we've got you here we don't mean to let you off under a month or two, I can assure you."

Christopher shook his head.

"I shan't be able to stay as long as that," he said, "but already you have made me feel so at home with you that I am sure it won't be for want of inclination."

"Then we're quits, for, by Jove! to see me now, you wouldn't believe I was the same man I was a few hours ago. Depend upon it, it's best to have nothing to do with those doctoring chaps; I know I wish I hadn't seen the one I went to. Not that I believe the half of what he said, only it isn't a cheerful idea to dwell upon, especially if a fellow happens to feel a bit seedy."

"I must say you don't look very much of an invalid," said Christopher laughingly—"not at all what I expected from your letter to find you."

Mr. Veriker was delighted.

"A bit of a humbug, then, you think me? All right; never mind that, so long as it has brought you to us."

"Oh, I heartily forgive you. For years it has been my wish to see you and Robin. As I was telling her this evening, hardly a day passed without my step-mother saying something to me about her. With her dying breath she spoke of her to my father, telling him always to remember that she was the child of her sister, and bore the name of Robina."

The words seemed to touch Mr. Veriker. He nodded his head, but made no answer; and Christopher thinking it best to accept this as a signal of dismissal, bade him good-night and went off to the room that had been prepared for him.

Once alone, he sat down with some vague idea of collecting his thoughts and examining his impressions, a task quickly given up as impossible—ears, eyes, imagination, all had run riot. Visions of Robin floated before him; stories and smart sayings of Mr. Veriker rang in his ears; a dozen schemes and fancies filled his brain: nothing was to be hoped for that night—his senses had become unmanageable and so completely beyond his control that he saw his wisest plan would be to hurry into bed, and trust to sleep and a night's rest for restoring, in place of this dazed being, the sober, matter-of-fact mortal he had up to this present time held himself to be.

Cramped by a continual atmosphere of repression, hitherto Christopher had rested ignorant of the capabilities for enjoyment which he possessed. This turmoil of new emotions, of gaiety and excitement, produced a sense of happiness entirely new to him, and he slept soundly and awoke refreshed, ready to carry out the plans which the night before he and Robin had made.

Those who know Venice will recall the life about to open out for Christopher, and such need not be told that a week there draws people closer together than years spent under ordinary circumstances in ordinary places.

From mid-day, when at Florian's, the Quadri, or at

an old haunt of Mr. Veriker's on the Riva dei Schiavoni, the three met to breakfast together, they were seldom or never apart.

Each morning, long before Mr. Veriker was up, Robin and Christopher had started off to visit some church or see some picture. At that early hour busy life had not begun to stir, the windows of the palaces were still dark, empty gondolas waited at the water-washed stairs below. Between the pauses of talk they could hear the distant murmur of the sea—the sea that washed upon the shores of the Lido—and Robin would strangle at its birth a sigh, for was it not there that she and Jack had spent so many blissful hours together?

At the quay below the Rialto, they would come upon the market boats piled up with fruit and greenery, fresh from far-off islands in the Lagoon, and dismissing Paolo, the two would saunter back through the Merceria, stopping like children here and there, caught by the sight of curious many-colored shells, bright Oriental stuffs, trinkets, gems, which soon, if Robin but admired, Christopher wanted at once to buy.

In the afternoon longer expeditions were undertaken. Only permit him to remain stretched at his ease on the cushions of the gondola, and Mr. Veriker never quarrelled at how far he was asked to go—Murano, Torcello, Chioggia—it did not matter in the least.

"All I bargain for is that we shall want some dinner," he would say, "so get back in decent time for that."

After dinner, with his coffee, Mr. Veriker liked a cigar, and while smoking it, a chat with some chance acquaintance who, posted up in the scandal of the place, could give him a little idea of what was going on around him. Robin, knowing his habits, would propose a stroll, and off together she and Christopher would go. Perhaps she would talk to him of her father, tell him of her past life, the places she had

seen, the way they had lived there—Christopher only dropping in a word here and there to keep her talking, not caring what she said so long as he might listen and look at her.

When she had taken these walks with Jack, Robin had never cared to speak, and if he did not talk there would be long silences between them, when instead of words, tremulous, half-smothered happy sighs rose to her lips; but with Christopher, as with her father, she had the desire to let her tongue run, and on from one subject to another it went without thought or care.

Only, two or three times, suddenly, in the midst, while she was yet speaking, a voice, a sound, the scent of a flower, the plash of an oar, would come as a sudden stab to her, and she would be seized by the impulse to run away, far off to some place where alone, unseen, she might fling herself down and ease this passion of sobs, which lay choking in her throat. How should she keep them back? She could not speak—at least not yet; so, pausing, with dumb-show she would bid Christopher look, and he, following her gaze, would stand as if rapt in, looking out afar, not seeing the fair scene that lay before him there, for his eyes were turned within watching the tumult of a most rebellious heart which fought and struggled, mocked by a voice which asked if its next cry was to be for the moon.

As distant and far off as seemed that moon which sailed above their heads, was any hope Christopher had that Robin should ever be moved to listen to his love. In that he never cheated himself; he knew that very soon after he had first seen her, though why, or how, or when, it ceased to be his own, he could not tell, he had delivered up to Robin every atom of his heart—it was hers, solely hers, to stab, to sting, to trample on.

Bitterness to Christopher! who would willingly have endured any pain if but a germ of hope lay hidden in it, Robin did none of this; she simply accepted all that she saw he offered her, and taxed his strength to its utmost limits by the outspoken, frank affection in

which she sought to pay him back, pleasing herself and, as she seemed to think, him by constantly recalling to his mind that pledge they were under to look upon each other as sister and brother. Well! under that subterfuge, so long as it kept him near to be of service to her, he would remain; there would be time and enough of sad opportunity, when he got back into the dull routine of his solitary life, to face his difficulties, take himself in hand, and regain the mastery of self-control. Christopher never doubted but that this mastery would be his; he forgot that a great teacher has said, "Withstand the beginning; after-remedies come too late."

But blind as Robin was—for eyes closed by love for one away ofttimes fail to see love that has drawn near—Mr. Veriker suffered from no short-sightedness in this matter. It did not take him long before he had come to a tolerably correct conclusion as to the turn affairs had taken. And how did the knowledge affect him?—it filled him by turns with satisfaction and displeasure: satisfaction inasmuch as Robin married, and his anxiety ended, what mattered anything so long as she was provided for? And then came the thought of how this provision would come about—by "that old brute's son" marrying his daughter, and up would leap the fire of enmity fanned into flame by a hundred bitter memories, until Mr. Veriker in his wrath and indignation would swear she had better beg her bread—he would rather see her marry anyone—Jack?—oh, a thousand times rather Jack than Christopher, that is, so long as Christopher had a father; but fathers could not live for ever, and old Blunt, tough as he was, the wrong side of sixty, must drop off some day, and then, surely there was nothing for Robin that he could desire better.

She was young, of an age when girls could be tempted into taking fancies; and with as much money as she cared for, to spend; a man who would worship her—take her where she liked to go, give her every-

thing she wanted—what on earth more could any girl wish for? And yet, all this and more had been offered to her mother! and—God reward her!—she had flung it aside for his sake, had chosen him, stuck by him, given up all to marry him; and he had broken her heart—she had died, they said, of the ruin he had brought upon her.

"No! no!" he murmured, wiping his eyes, which of late were apt to grow dim whenever he dwelt—as he often dwelt now, on past days and old memories; "I must try and keep her child from making such a sacrifice. I won't think of Jack, we must give him the slip: it won't do—he's too much what I was, and we're not worth it, fellows like Jack and me."

And then in his mind arose a more present difficulty.

Suppose anything did chance to happen to him, and Jack was written to as soon as he heard of it, if he fancied her left alone to get on as best she could, he'd be safe to come and see what was going to become of her; and if she'd found a home with the Blunts, or with somebody they knew, to have a fellow like Jack dropping suddenly down among a strait-laced set would never do.

"In their respectable eyes it would d—— her as completely," he said, "as if she had me constantly at her elbow."

CHAPTER XI.

STRANGELY enough, since Christopher's arrival, neither Robin nor Mr. Veriker had once mentioned Jack before him. By tacit consent his name was avoided, and if in telling a story reference was obliged to be made to him, he was spoken of as a friend who happened at the time to be one of their party. Even to one another they had ceased to talk of him, and to the name once familiar—though it still lay ever on their tongues—they refused utterance.

"I want papa to forget," Robin would say to herself —"to fancy that I don't think about Jack—that I don't care for him any more."

Poor child! to have it suspected that she had given her love without it being asked or being wanted, seemed a terrible humiliation. For if Jack could not look on her as anything but a child, that her father should still regard her as one was a necessity; and though well she knew that girls sometimes married at her age, and that in some experiences she was older than many women, still the thought of being looked on by those two as forward beyond her years, brought blushes to her face, and filled her with shame and confusion.

What a relief it was to feel that Christopher knew nothing of this—dear, quiet, sober, matter-of-fact Christopher! With him she could be as free as air without any fear of misinterpretation; she could say what she liked, as she pleased; they could discuss, speculate, argue about everything together, more especially about love, a theme that somehow always came uppermost—led to, Robin believed, by her desires—entered on, Christopher feared, by his hopes. Both professed great ignorance regarding it, and yet each spoke as if from experience—Robin wounding, slaying the tender passion with her tongue; Christopher upholding, pleading for, defending it.

How often—in after-days—Christopher went over those walks again, holding a knowledge then which shed a light on each discussion. Carried away, he would seem to stand on the very spot where the words were said; the surroundings of the scene a cruelly faithful memory brought before him. Above, the stars; below, the sea—a forest of gondolas moored round the steps close by which they were standing. Sometimes, tempted by the beauty of the night, they would step into one of these and be rowed out to San Giorgio.

As long as he lived, Christopher never forgot one of

those evenings, nor the enchantment in which they had enthralled him.

"Oh, how we shall miss him when he is gone!" Robin said over and over again to her father.

And Mr. Veriker agreed with her

Of late more especially for the last ten days or so, he had been constantly dwelling on the possibility of Robin herself having the desire to care for Christopher.

"She's got sense enough," he said to himself, "and, it's my belief, sees that it would be a good thing for her—that keeping mum about Jack, never dropping a syllable about him, shows to my mind that the wind's in that direction."

And then he would sigh and premise that it was the best thing that could happen, particularly if she thought so. Women were odd fish, 'twas of no use men trying to fathom them. He had thought she meant to break her heart over Jack. "Poor old Jack!" He felt quite sorry for him, grew sentimental each time he thought of him, until a certain day when—happily Robin was not with him—a letter was brought to him, a letter from Jack, full of reproaches that he had been left so long a time without hearing a word about them.

Full of alarm, Mr. Veriker put this letter into his pocket. What was the use of upsetting everything now? He rather thought it was his duty to keep silent and say nothing about it; if he showed her what Jack had written, how could he tell in what way it would affect Robin? besides, beyond the present there was the future to be thought of.

The reading of that letter had thrown him into a state of agitation; one by one his fears began to awaken, and with each dull thud of his heart a mournful voice repeated: "Jack must be got rid of—Jack must be got rid of."

So with the idea of strengthening his resolution, but in reality as a relief to this fit of nervous emotion, he ran his eyes once more over the paper and then tore it up into atoms, which he threw away.

Perhaps the consciousness of this deception disposed Mr. Veriker to be the whole of the ensuing day more than usually critical with Christopher, so that, strive as he might, he could not help comparing everything he said or did with what Jack would have said or would have done in similar circumstances.

It had been arranged that the afternoon should be devoted to visiting Murano. The weather was perfect: an opal sky, an azure sea, with a filmy mist which softened without obscuring all it fell upon. Never before had Christopher felt himself so entirely under the influence of this external beauty; it seemed to enslave his imagination, to attack his senses so that he became absent and dreamy; and Robin, noticing his humor, began to twit him on his idleness and want of energy.

Assisted by her father, soon a dozen openings were given, each of which a more ready man would have seized on as an opportunity for furthering his suit; but for two reasons Christopher said nothing to the purpose—in the first place, the gift of ready speech had been denied him; in the second, his feelings were too earnest to find outlet in froth. Shallow waters run their course noisily; deep rivers flow silently.

To gauge Christopher, therefore, was beyond the depth of Mr. Veriker's power: remembering his own successes, his theory was that women as a rule give their love to those best practised in the art of winning it. What was the good of sitting mum and saying nothing?—a beggar that is dumb, you know.

"Ah, yes," he said to himself, "a beggar that is dumb! but this dumb beggar had eyes to look out of, not to see with, which is about all the use poor Christopher can make of his."

And this led him to a mental survey of Jack's face, which had always been a puzzle to him inasmuch as he knew, that so far as actual good looks went, his own beat it.

"But for real downright mischief," he mused reflectively, "upon my life, I'd back Jack's phisog against any other;" and without altering his position or letting his eyes wander to where Christopher and Robin were sitting, he conjured up the two he had so often seen there together—remembered how his weak nature had made him go back with Paolo so that he might avoid the embarrassment of feeling he ought to look after them.

A side-glance stolen at Robin showed him a head drooped, a face dreamy with a shadowed sadness in the far-off gaze of eyes which smote his heart heavily within him. Was it of Jack she was thinking? Poor child, why had he not looked after them better? Surely it might have struck any man who knew Jack as he did, that it was the right thing to do. And then, as a salve to the course he had now taken, came the probability that a thousand to one, in spite of all that he had written, by this time Jack had found friends and was in the way of soon being caught by new faces.

Times out of number when Robin was in pinafores, he had known Jack in love—furiously smitten, worked up to the white heat of passion, so that all his friends were betting on the fool he was about to make of himself; and in the very thick of it all, some fine morning, everybody awoke to learn that Jack was gone—had left the place, nobody, his inamorata included, able to guess for where, or for what earthly reason. Everyone had some conjecture to hazard, but it never occurred to anyone and certainly not to Mr. Veriker, to be within a mile of the truth, which generally was, that at a certain point of sliding Jack had suddenly pulled himself up, looked temptation in the face, and in the battle which ensued had come off so far conqueror that he had strength left to run away from his danger.

It was this habit that had stood him in good stead when he had made up his mind concerning Robin, with the difference that in place of striving to rid himself of every recollection, Jack carried away Robin's face

enshrined in his inmost heart. The knowledge that she loved him he treasured as a talisman to help him to get on, and to protect him from evil.

"Bless her! bless her!" he would say, pressing to his lips an old faded photograph taken in the early days when Robin wore short petticoats and her hair hung loose down her back. Below in crooked, cramped letters she had written then, "Your own, your very own, Robin."

"And so she is still!" Jack would tell himself triumphantly. "I don't believe it has ever entered her head to give a single thought to any other man."

The result of Jack's past made this certainty score a great deal for Robin, and then absence, occupation, a strange place, with not a creature he knew, all helped to fan a flame which, under other circumstances or elsewhere, might by this time have flickered very low. Jack had always been a bad correspondent, and unless one wanted something or the other, during any of the times they had been apart, very few letters had passed between him and the Verikers. Now, much as he would have liked to write and hear from Robin, the same sense of honor which had closed his lips fettered his pen; to write to her the everyday commonplace letter of a friend was impossible, and by her silence he judged that she was under the same influence. But this feeling had nothing to do with Mr. Veriker, whom Jack anathematized from a free vocabulary as the most selfish, the laziest fellow the earth contained. Oh, if he only had him near! for words easy to say have an ugly look on paper, and Jack had to content himself by a somewhat curt epistle, asking in straightforward English to be informed what they were about, where they were going, and what they were meaning to do, and it was this very letter which, reaching Mr. Veriker, had caused him such perplexity.

More than a week had gone by since he had received it, and so far nothing was done. Every morning he awoke with the determination to write to Jack, but the

day passed and the night came, and he went to bed again not having done it.

Happily for his decision, it was at length in a way forced by a conversation with Christopher, in which he related with much satisfaction certain portions of a letter received by him that morning from his father. Mr. Blunt acknowledged himself very satisfied with the reports which had been given him ; he asked question after question regarding Robin, and he particularly desired, as he wished to see what she was like that Christopher should bring back a photograph of her. There seemed no doubt, then, but that when she needed it—and a terrible conviction was forced on him that need it soon she would—a home with these relations would be offered her ; and if so, Jack must be got rid of, put altogether off their scent—and the sooner it was done the better.

The following day Mr. Veriker excused himself from the afternoon expedition. Under the plea of lying down to get some rest he would secure the opportunity of writing Jack a letter.

The paper lay upon the table, the pen was in his hand, only the words to say were not ready.

The poor battered conscience which had slept undisturbedly through many a doubtful transaction was suddenly up in arms, and Mr. Veriker lacked all heart to quiet it.

Until now, it had not come to him how much he cared for Jack—valued his good opinion—enjoyed his fellowship ; and he was going to fling all these away, cut himself off from him altogether. Already his memory had traveled back to bygone days ; he was going through past scenes—remembering forgotten debts, old obligations. It was true that Jack had a habit of saying hard things, and at times made you feel a terribly rough tongue of his own, but for sticking to his word and never sneaking out of it if things went wrong, he hadn't his fellow.

The afternoon had slipped away, but Mr. Veriker

was but very little advanced with his letter, and yet it must be written; for Robin's sake he must make the sacrifice, it was the only amends he could make her. So with as much jauntiness as he could find expression for, he informed Jack that he felt wonderfully better, but not so well as he yet meant to be when they found a place with more sun, and fewer people from their own country.

"It's up stick, and away now from Venice; so until we find another resting-place you won't hear from us. I have the address you left to write to in case of necessity, but there's little fear but you will get some news of us before you move from where you're now hanging out."

Then followed a rhodomontade respecting his health and his hopes of speedily getting quite well again, an invented message or two from Robin, and he signed his name and it was finished.

Sealed and directed, he sat with it in his hand, with his eyes, looking straight before him, fixed on vacancy. Suddenly he buried his face in his arms. Even when alone men seek to hide their tears, and this treachery to Jack seemed the warrant of his own death—in casting him off he was giving up his last lingering hopes of life.

CHAPTER XII

IT was Christopher's last evening in Venice; he was to start the next day, and he and Robin and Mr. Veriker were full of those promises, agreements, stipulations, which friends at parting make together.

Each had some confidence to impart, something particular to say—best said when only one was with the other; and, in consequence, a series of stratagems were resorted to, and kept up on Mr. Veriker's part to get rid of Robin, and in the case of Robin and Christopher to get rid of Mr. Veriker. In this the two latter had just succeeded. Christopher wanted to have a last

look of sunset from the public gardens, and he had asked Robin to go with him there.

"We won't include you," he said to Mr. Veriker, "because it might make you feel tired, and you and I will want to have our talk later."

In the Via Garibaldi, as is usual, a crowd of loiterers were looking in at the shop-windows, before which neither Christopher nor Robin cared to linger. They walked briskly, talking of indifferent subjects until they reached the entrance of the gardens, which, except for a few old men and some women clustered together, were deserted.

"Shall we go to the end—to our favorite seat?" asked Robin, leading the way.

Christopher followed her—he was full of that dumb pain which hangs on our spirits and is a weight on our tongues; he wanted Robin to know how much he suffered at parting with her, and he could find no words in which to tell her.

The seat reached—a tumble-down affair backed by some thick feathery tamarisk trees—they sat down, and for some time, without speaking, watched the "orb's departing glory." Robin's thoughts ran on many things; Christopher's on one. Dare he venture to take her hand? Almost fearing to meet her look, he took it. Startled, Robin turned quickly round, but only to smile at him encouragingly, and clasp the palm which trembled next her own. A lump of lead seemed to sink within Christopher; with quick pressure he took his hand away. What a terrible jar to love is mere affection!

Jewelled with islands, there, spread out before them, lay the golden sea, girt round with outlined chain of snowy peaks. The fishing-boats, with orange sails, were dotted here and there waiting for the wind, a gentle breeze of which already was being wafted from afar.

"Robin!" Christopher in desperation at length exclaimed, "you'll think of me sometimes, won't you?"

Her thoughts had wandered off to Jack. It was he who had taught her to feel the beauty of a scene like this.

"Think of you! Yes!" rousing herself, "and very often too."

"That's right"—how his sentences seemed jerked out to-night; his heart kept up such a thudding that he had no breath to give his speech the measure it usually had. "And whatever you want in any way you're to write to me—you remember that?"

"I'm not likely to forget," and she smiled sadly, "considering I have no one in the world who cares to be of use to me—but you."

Should he tell her? It was madness, he knew, but yet, oh, the sick longing that came into his heart! Involuntarily he shut his eyes, opening them to find Robin looking at him.

"The glare dazzles you," she said.

Alas! instead of the despair which Jack would have called up to his aid, Christopher's face showed nothing but that his eyes were weak and filled with water.

"I ought not to look at the sun," he said bitterly, and he put up his hand and pressed his fingers tight, striving to keep back that current which was sapping all his strength.

Futile! vain! hopeless! none knew better than himself, were any words which he might now say—Robin did not love him, in that never for a moment had he been deceived; his deception lay in the belief that as yet she did not know love, and in the cherished hope that at some distant, far-off day to come, it might be his to teach the lesson. And nurturing this hope, fed by a thousand specious arguments, Christopher would conjure up his own image, scan his appearance, examine into his advantages, trying to discover if he possessed one single merit that could prove a lure by which the heart he coveted might be caught. He too, had a photograph of Robin to look at—the one lately taken at Vianelli's to show to his father—and in

his own room, when alone, he would take it from out its many coverings, and hold it before him, feasting his eyes. Fool! madman! that he was—ever to dream that she could be won by him.

For Robin, without possessing the gift of rare beauty, had a face which steals away men's hearts: there was in it a mixture of childlike innocence and daring sauciness—she could look tears and smile sunshine. Then her light-heartedness and gaiety of disposition, inherited from her father, were a species of subtle intoxication far removed from the effect of high spirits, which she did not possess, and which when not shared in makes companions sad. Robin had rather the art of adapting herself to every one's humor, and while doing so the power of gradually imparting to them her own.

The opportunity of making girl-friends had never been given her. Mr. Veriker had kept aloof from the society of women; it was a tribute to the love in which he held his wife's memory, that, being in the prime of life and very handsome, he pointedly avoided seeking any feminine intimacy. Those who had the hardihood to disregard this avoidance and to thrust themselves on him, he protected his daughter from, and—as whenever Jack was with them he had a worthy coadjutor in him—the world of women was a *terra incognita* to Robin. Was it from this reason that she was so utterly devoid of the small—the petty—weaknesses common to many of her sex? She knew that she was pretty, and openly showed the pleasure she took in the fact; but of vanity—in its true meaning—she had none. Candid, frank, open, the girl with good training might have been perfect; as it was left to run wild with no pruning, she lacked many of those moral conditions without which no character can be duly balanced.

It must not be supposed that Christopher was blind to the faults he saw in her, neither could he turn a deaf ear to some things which pained him inexpressibly. Careful as Mr. Veriker strove to be, and anxious as he was to appear at his best before Christopher, as a fig

tree cannot bring forth thistles, nor a grape thorns, neither can a man whose morality is easy call up virtues to assume at will. Mr. Veriker would talk of doubtful people to Robin; tell stories before her, at which Christopher—who had given her wings—would feel his hair stand on end, and—severest shock of all—his angel would supply names, jog her father's memory, and help out his recollections.

When Jack was with them Robin suffered from many a sharp rebuke from him, and had often been told to hold her tongue; but much as it pained Christopher, he felt powerless to speak—the evil seemed rooted so much deeper down to him. It had its origin in the life she led, the places she saw; and apart from his love, he was possessed by a great longing to rescue her from this, to guide her by a teaching of which she knew nothing; for of many truths, the heathen in a savage land had as much knowledge as poor Robin. And the same compassion—although in a lesser degree—he spread out towards Mr. Veriker, with whom Christopher never talked without realizing how impotent words are when, to those we say them to they bear no meaning.

Mr. Veriker's sole anxiety as to death was that he had to leave Robin. "I'm afraid I must make up my mind to throw up my hand," he would say, "and there, so far as I've found out, will be an end of the game—and of me." Then, seeing that Christopher looked pained, he would add by way of consolation, "You talk to Robin about that, my good fellow; make her listen to what you've been telling me—women are ever so much easier to convince about that sort of thing than men are."

It never seemed to present itself to Mr. Veriker that Christopher was a man—most certainly he never regarded him as one; he rather looked on him as some strange anomaly, some unaccountable being, possessing a pot of money, and not an idea of enjoying it! —except in spending it on him and Robin, and that

certainly he had done freely enough since he had been there; he was never tired of bringing them gifts, anticipating their wishes, providing them with pleasures. They had lived as much as was possible *en prince* since Christopher had come to Venice.

Alluding to something which she was to do—in the conversation which ensued that evening in the public gardens—Robin said:

"But we shall have to draw in our horns when you are gone: we couldn't afford to do by ourselves what we have done while you have been with us."

"Afford!" said Christopher reprovingly; "why do you pain me by making me repeat the same thing again and again to you, Robin? What good is there in calling myself your brother, if you will not give me the privileges of one?"

Either his tone or manner seemed to trouble her; she shot a quick glance at him.

"Give!" she said, with a half smile and shake of her head; "you have done nothing else but give from the first minute we saw you. I don't know how we shall ever repay you, Christopher."

"By consenting to come to England, you could."

And give up Jack for ever! That was what her sigh meant.

"It's not possible?" he asked anxiously, looking at her; "you wouldn't like it?" The little sigh had not escaped his ear.

"Oh, I don't think I should mind. The question is, how would our fathers agree?"

With the knowledge he had of Mr. Veriker's health, Christopher hardly knew what to reply. Mr. Blunt had at all times an ungovernable temper, and he regarded it a privilege of his prosperity that he was not called upon to restrain himself for anyone. At any moment an outburst of passion might be fatal to Mr. Veriker; and the two men together, how soon cause might be given for that to come, no one who knew them both could say.

"Agree?" he said, as if he had been considering the matter; "perhaps better now that they are both older."

Robin smiled.

"I don't know that—age seldom improves tempers, I fancy."

"I am sure you would get on with my father," Christopher began.

"You think so—I wonder, should I?"

"Yes; I am sure you would, and with everybody about too, and that is why he wants to know the neighbors better than we do."

"Would there be girls among the neighbors to know?"

"Some there are."

"Nice girls?"

"I think so."

"Pretty?"

"I believe they are thought so."

"Haven't you seen them, then?"

"Many times I've seen them."

"And yet don't know what they are to look at, whether they are pretty or not." Robin laughed softly: "When they ask you about me, Christopher, what are you going to say?"

"They won't ask me," he stammered.

Oh! if she could but read his thoughts, and learn from them what he wanted to say.

"But your father will ask you?"

"I have your photograph to show."

"And you think that does me justice?" and the look of mischief she turned on him was beyond the art of photography to portray. "Oh, Christopher, you are not given to flattery, that I must say."

"Would you like me to flatter you?" he managed to ask.

"No, I should like you to tell me the truth," and she smiled saucily.

"The truth, Robin," he said, and his voice almost died away.

Was it the return of that vague fear which made her interrupt him, and quickly cry:

"But I am wasting our last evening in nonsense, forgetting how far away this time to-morrow you will be, and the hundred things I shall remember then that I have forgotten to say to you now."

"Never mind," and Christopher drew a long breath, "what you forget"—his decision was taken: he wouldn't risk a longer stay—"if you will keep your promise not to forget me."

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. VERIKER was the victim of two states of feeling. When he was tolerably well, and the chances seemed remote as to when it might occur, he could—to anyone but Robin—talk of his death as probably near. The instant any cause brought back symptoms he had been told to fear, though his life had depended on it, he could not have approached the subject. The very thought that anyone about him suspected his dread was sufficient to aggravate his pain and distress his breathing. Unconsciously the prompting of many things he had to say to Christopher was the supposition that they might never meet again, and the continued repetition of the thought became oppressive to him—it acted on his nerves and made them sensitive and irritable.

While Robin and Christopher were absent at the gardens, he had been annoyed by some trifling incident which had gone wrong in the hotel. At another time he would have passed it over; now he believed it had been done purposely to aggravate him. He tried to make light of it on their return, and Robin, skilled in the art of soothing disaster, hoped when they set off to dine that he had got over it. The dinner—as is often the case when no one feels particularly cheerful, and everyone is bent on seeming so—was rather a dull affair. Another party had secured Erasmo, and the

waiter they had was a fresh man who did not know anything about them; the dishes were ill-made, had been kept waiting; the wine, "nothing like what they had usually," did not go well with them. Like most brilliant, fascinating people, when Mr. Veriker was disposed to find fault nothing satisfied him.

"I don't think he is well," said Robin in an undertone to Christopher. They had finished their dinner and were crossing over to Florian's for coffee and ices. "You ask him how he feels—he does not like me to notice him."

"Feel all right?" said Christopher, with pointed inquiry—they had found a table and were waiting for chairs.

"Right!"—Mr. Veriker's tone implied what in heaven's name should make any one ask him if he felt right—"as a trivet," he said; "that is, as right as any one can feel who has had to eat the most abominable dinner ever served to mortal man. Whew!" he said, in a voice which scared the very senses out of a flower girl, and an urchin with matches who had come up close, in prospect of a customer; "I should like to have on the end of a fork the heart of the wretch who cooked it."

"Papa, you have scarified these two poor creatures. Hist!—Hist!—come here," she called in Italian. "Christopher, buy something of them—I'll pick you out a button-hole. Which do you like, pink or red? Oh! here's some orange-blossom—you'll have that, won't you?"

"What does it mean?" Christopher asked.

"Oh, nothing that you need be afraid of; on the contrary, you will be for ever safe from me; you never marry the person to whom you give orange-blossoms."

She had taken hold of his coat—the little bouquet was in her hand; Christopher snatched it from her and threw it again into the basket.

"Give me a pink one," he said; "that oleander will do."

"And not the orange-blossoms? Oh, well, I will have it myself, then!"

"I won't pay for it if you do."

"How disgustingly mean of you! Papa, give me some money; I haven't any, and Christopher won't buy a bouquet for me."

"I haven't got any," said Mr. Veriker; "since Christopher has been with us I haven't carried any, on principle."

Robin turned and said something in Italian to the girl.

"She'll trust me, she says."

"All right," replied Christopher, "let her; I don't care how you get it, as long as you can't say I gave it to you."

This little episode, which at another time would have provoked Mr. Veriker's good-humor, only now increased his discontent.

"What is the good," he thought, "of his plucking up courage now? That's the sort of thing he ought to have begun a week ago, not have waited until just as he is on the verge of starting. I'm sure he has had opportunities enough, but he has made nothing of them. If that had been Jack, now—pshaw!"

Mr. Veriker's imagination failed him to think to what point, under similar circumstances, Jack would have reached by this time. Since the departure of that letter his regrets for the friend he had cast himself off from had been never-ending. With no hope of their meeting again, Jack had been exalted to a height of perfection he had never attained before; and whenever —and of late he had very frequently done so—he compared him with Christopher, Mr. Veriker was disposed to consider that in his daughter's interest he had made himself a martyr.

"We none of us want to be late to-night, do we?" said Robin, interrupting this reverie of her father's.

"I don't," he said; "but I suppose you and Christopher will want to go off presently and have your

stroll by the water. Hist!" he called to a man in the distance with newspapers, "which of those fellows is it—can you see, Robin? Not that it much matters. I don't expect one of them has got a *Figaro*."

"If not, we'll go and try and get you one."

"Rubbish, child, get me one! If I can't have the *Figaro*, I shall do well enough with something else. Be off, the two of you, and have your walk, and then there'll be some chance of getting home in decent time to-night."

Robin looked at him uneasily; all the old signs of worry had come back: he sighed, stretched himself out, altered his position restlessly, pushed back anything that happened to be near, moved his chair if people came close to him.

"We're not thinking of going to-night," she began. "Christopher and I have said all we want to say to each other. We want to be all three together for the last time, don't we, Christopher?"

"Yes," said Christopher.

Oppressed, perhaps, by the compliment paid him, Mr. Veriker suddenly shifted himself on his seat, a chair near him lost its balance, and in its fall knocked against the arm of a waiter, who attending to anything but the tray of glasses he carelessly held, down they went with a clatter which made everybody near jump up, thus affording an opportunity for Mr. Veriker to rid himself of the burst of expletives that were boiling over against Christopher.

This threatening of the old trouble which for more than a month now had seemed gone for ever, had brought back all his anxiety about Robin's future. He wanted to feel assured that it was securely settled, and he was seized on by the idea that this would be done if Christopher spoke to her. In a conversation of a few nights before, the subject had been lightly touched on between them; but at that time Mr. Veriker, in capital spirits—after a pleasant day and an excellent dinner—saw no reason to hurry matters. Young girls,

he said—generalizing—seldom know their own minds, and often it was not until they missed a man that it ever occurred to them how much they had cared for him. He did not know that one succeeded any the better for being too pressing in such cases. His advice would be, leave a little for absence to do—that and time work wonders.

Even to Mr. Veriker, Christopher had not in plain words admitted the feeling he was inspired with for Robin, but yielding to the encouragement to confidence, and assured of the knowledge he possessed, he had permitted himself to find an outlet in those vague discussions which, without naming, bear reference to our individual affections. With all his art and tact it was impossible for Mr. Veriker to assume sympathy with feelings he knew nothing of, and it therefore frequently happened that at the very moment when Christopher was about to make a clean breast of his love, a word, a doubtful joke, a past experience would make him draw back his confidence and lock it tight up again.

On this last evening, however, he had made up his mind to speak more openly. One reason for his previous silence had been the fear of Mr. Veriker making inopportune allusions to his state of feeling; his departure would render this impossible, therefore he might reasonably tell him of that hope he nourished of making Robin at some future time care for him. It would be an opportunity to convince him of the interest he had in her, and a pledge of assurance that in case her father was taken from her she would still have a protector left. Christopher was much occupied with all he meant to say—the matter of his speech and how he should best arrange his words made him thoughtful and absent. That he was able to keep under that pain of parting, and to think of others rather than himself, was but in keeping with his character. Robin, more than usually anxious, spoke only by fits and starts, the wrong twist which everything that evening had taken seemed to have upset her.

Mr. Veriker seizing on any occasion to find fault, declared, rising, that he couldn't stand the two of them any longer.

"Mutes at a funeral would be cheerful to you," he said; "we'd best go in—another hour of this sort of thing," and he gave a most obtrusive shiver, "would make me ready to throw myself into the canal yonder."

Robin jumped up; Christopher followed.

"You're anxious, I'm afraid," he said softly.

"A little—I was hoping it was all past and gone—he seemed so much better."

"So I hope he will be again to-morrow."

"I am so sorry you are going, Christopher."

Because she was speaking in a whisper, to emphasize her words, she stretched out her hand towards him. He took it—the little warm palm lay next to his—why should he not carry it to his lips and cover it with kisses—kisses that must surely tell her what he was longing to utter. No, no; there were so many people about, near enough to see, close enough to listen to them—it would never do—so he only tightened his hold of her hand as he said, bending down:

"Sorry are you, Robin—tell me—why?"

"Because he has been so well ever since you came here," she answered simply.

Did the girl guess the pain she was giving? Was it the desire to wound which made her answer so?

Love is very cruel to love, and the heart which has given itself to another is often hedged about by thorns ready to make all who come too near bleed and suffer.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE next day Christopher left Venice. He started at an early hour before the morning haze had cleared away, and by the time the train reached the end of that long bridge which crosses the Lagune, every trace of the city behind him had vanished.

Fortunately, as he considered it, he had the carriage

to himself, and could move about as he pleased, and do as he liked, without disturbing any one. He had said good-bye to Mr. Veriker at the hotel; had parted with Robin at the railway station; and as the line of towers and spires on which his eyes remained fixed became faint, obscured, and now blotted out altogether, he asked, Was it all a dream, a vision that had passed away and was over? Should he wake up presently to find himself the Christopher he had been—aimless, purposeless, with no settled interest in life—the round man in the square hole? No, thank God! that was not likely, whatever might come of this visit, and the presentiment was strong in him that the result would be more of pain than of pleasure, it had had the effect of lifting him out of himself—had tried his strength, tested his capabilities, made him know how little he could do, and alas! feel how much he could suffer.

There had been very few words exchanged between him and Robin that morning, and certainly not a whisper of love had passed between them, and yet Christopher felt she was nearer to him, that in some way she had herself drawn closer. Would the words Mr. Veriker had said come to pass? Was it true that sometimes not until the hour of parting was love discovered? Christopher would not cheat himself so far as that, but the tremulous allusions to good-byes, the regretful eyes that looked farewell, lit up within his breast the torch of hope.

"In time, in time," a voice within went singing. Nurtured by tenderness, strengthened by devotion, might not the tiny germ spread out into fair blossom yet? Christopher's heart swelled at the bare supposition—the craving for love had grown so strong in him that he caught at, and clung to, each straw of promise, finding great comfort in the fact of Robin's youth, her jesting talk and utter disbelief in love, and in all that was advanced in proof of man's devotion. That showed —so Christopher argued—that her heart was yet untouched; she could not jest at scars if she had felt a

wound, and in all the conversations he had had with her and her father, there had never been a mention made of any one whom by any possibility he could turn into a rival. Mr. Veriker—as well as Robin—had been very frank in all he had told him about their past life, describing, with that happy knack he had, their surroundings and associates, so that for the time Christopher saw both the place and the people.

It had so happened that during the journey to the railway station, notwithstanding it was his last morning with Robin, at least for some time—and how often for some time means for ever—Christopher's thoughts ran mostly on Mr. Veriker. Perhaps Robin guessed as much, for, unlike her usual self—pouring out hopes and fears—she sat either silent or making some trivial remark, but without an allusion to her father, and yet she had seen him, had gone up to his room to ask if he was not coming down to say good-bye to Christopher, as the night before he had announced he meant to do.

On the previous evening when they got back to the hotel, Christopher was prepared for some final communications which they had long spoken of having; but though to afford the opportunity Robin left them undisturbed, Mr. Veriker had apparently nothing to say: at least, he said nothing, until Christopher broached the conversation, when suddenly jumping up, he declared he must go at once off to bed—he was tired out, could not talk then if the whole universe depended on it. "Yes, yes," he knew, he hadn't forgotten what he wanted to say, but it must be said to-morrow, he'd get up early, and see Christopher off; there would be time enough before he started for both of them to have a talk, and say all they wanted to say to each other. So in expectation of his making his appearance, Christopher had tranquilly waited, until the hour for departure drew so dangerously near that Robin volunteered to run up to her father's room, and see if she could not hurry his movements.

"Christopher!" she called, "Christopher! you are

to come up here: he is not going to the station, he is not well this morning."

Conversant by this time with the self-indulgent habits of Mr. Veriker, and his rooted dislike to early rising, Christopher was beginning to twit him, when at sight of the altered face, pinched and pain-drawn, he stopped. Since the first dawn of early day, when—awakening from unrefreshing sleep—Mr. Veriker had remembered that Christopher was going, he had been screwing up courage to send for him. Now that he had put it off until there was but a moment or so to spare, he could only feebly grasp the hand put into his without having strength to utter a word, but the look he gave, oh, how it haunted Christopher—he could not rid himself of it, it seemed to come between him and everything he turned his eyes upon; and if for a moment his thoughts went off elsewhere, the memory of that drawn face and those despairing eyes beckoned them back, and stirred him with new regrets.

It was quite a relief to him that Robin did not question him, and that when he came down they had to hurry off to the steps, making no remark to each other but such as related to the things he had to carry and how pressed he was for time. He hardly dare look at her, fearing she should discover the trouble in his face—trouble which sprang from reproach, that he had made so little of his opportunities in trying to influence the poor fellow he had just left.

To a serious contemplative mind like Christopher's, there had always been something very terrible in the flippancy displayed by Mr. Veriker regarding his state—to be judged leniently because he could but acknowledge the magic that that gay humor exercised upon himself, so completely carrying him away that at moments when he had resolved to be most earnest, his gravest thoughts had been swept off in its whirlwind of fun and frolic.

Up to the previous evening he had hardly realized that a frown could abide on that smiling face, or that

ill-temper could more than brush past that careless genial disposition. Now—this morning—another door had been unlocked for him, and without a word of warning the skeleton which hitherto Mr. Veriker had hidden out of sight had been shown to him.

There were no doubts now in Christopher's mind as to the reasons which had prompted that first letter—it had not only been written by a dying man, but by a man who knew that he was dying; and recalling the jests made over doctors' mistakes, the laughter indulged in at their cautions and croaking, Christopher was filled with unutterable sadness, for he saw plainly now that all this talk was but a subterfuge to conceal the dread reality.

"Can it have anything to do with your going away?" Robin said abruptly.

They had reached the station, she and Christopher were standing on the platform together, and his thoughts had traveled back to the short time since, when on that very spot, the two had stood side by side, strangers to one another.

He looked at her questioningly, his ear had not quite caught what she said—they had not been speaking of Mr. Veriker.

"You thought he looked ill, didn't you, this morning?"

"I did not think he seemed at all well last night," Christopher answered evasively.

Robin took hold of his hand and held it tightly in her own; she said nothing, but her face, half averted from Christopher, told him the distress she was controlling.

"But you know," he said soothingly, "that I am very often ill myself."

"Yes?" and she drew nearer, as if finding sympathy.

"Don't you remember my telling you that at home for weeks together, at times, I am not well?"

"And yet you get all right again?"

"As you see."

A smile came into her face.

"Oh, Christopher!" and in the sigh she gave she seemed to find relief, "why must you go? Why can't you stay?"

"Ah!" he said, getting into the carriage, for the train was on the point of starting, and, like many another one, just as he was going he felt his courage come, "if I could but think you felt so sorry to part with me, as I do to say good-bye to you."

Was it fear of the carriage moving that made her suddenly draw back? Perhaps having to raise it gave her voice that altered tone.

"I don't take it as a good-bye," she said, "but as *au revoir.*"

"What does that mean; that you are coming to us, or am I to return to you?"

"Which would you like?"

"Either—both—anything—everything—that would keep me with you."

The desire to say the words, and the fear of saying them—for it seemed as if his meaning must be heard in each syllable—made everything before Christopher's eyes dance to and fro; the carriage gave a jerk which sent him forward and back, there was a shrill whistle which made him start up to exchange one more look with Robin, and they were off—the train was moving, he had lost sight of her, and very soon strain to the utmost his eyes, as he did, they no longer saw anything that could be called Venice.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. BLUNT had proposed that his son should diversify his journey back from Venice, instead of which, Christopher had written to say he was coming home direct. A telegram from Paris would announce the day and hour of his arrival.

Now that he had left the Verikers, he was all anx-

iety to see his father, and accustomed to reproach himself with want of tact in his usual management of him, most of his thoughts ran on how he could act so as best to serve his friends.

Unfortunately for Christopher he had to struggle against a terribly sensitive nature, of which his father had never been able to form the slightest comprehension. Blessed with robust health and great bodily strength, that inherent delicacy of constitution which gave his son nerves and a dozen unexplained ailments, was a mystery to Mr. Blunt; one which he tried to solve by every remedy in which he had any curing faith. "Let him get up and eat a good breakfast"—"Take a ten-mile walk"—"Put a bottle of good wine into him," these were Mr. Blunt's prescriptions, and after more than twenty years of failure, he still went on repeating them.

With the one exception of his late wife, to whom he had most discovered his feelings, not a living soul had an idea of the sort of idolatry in which Mr. Blunt held Christopher—not *that* Christopher, with whom as an individual he had no sympathy, felt no companionship, had not a taste in common—but that fruit of his body, who bore his name and would inherit his money. Why, it was to make him a gentleman that he had toiled and labored—on his account that he lived hedged in by surroundings from which he drew neither comfort nor enjoyment.

While Mrs. Blunt had lived her good sense and influence had prevented the outburst of display in which her husband had since indulged. Sensible of his social defects, she had taken care to arrange their household with a due regard to hide them; but another rule had sway now, and Mr. Blunt sat at his meals in solemn state, with a magnificent footman behind his chair, and the eye of a solemn butler fixed on him.

What a curse to many a self-made man are those small niceties of behavior, so difficult of practice to those who have not been early trained in them—that,

"Oh, beg pardon, sir, thought perhaps I hadn't placed you a fork," was sufficient—feeling his knife was in his mouth—to upset Mr. Blunt's appetite for the most tempting dishes. "This glass, sir, for hock, sir," and the wine had no more flavor than water.

Why didn't Christopher get married? That was what Mr. Blunt wanted, then he could come and go when he liked, have a home in the country and a little place in London, where with a few companions of bygone days he could eat as he pleased, drink as he liked, talk, make merry, cut jokes, and enjoy himself. But to get married, you must go out and seek a wife, for though persuaded, as he was, that not a girl in Wadpole or the country round but would snap at being Mrs. Christopher Blunt—his son's wife; yet it was expecting too much, that in the first instance they should all come running after him.

"We want somebody here to look after us," he would say, if at any time chance brought a young lady in his way.

"I'm not speaking for myself; I'm too old to try a number three, but my son Christopher, there——" and he would look at his son, thinking he had made an opportunity for him; but Christopher would take no notice, and worse still he would take no notice of the lady.

"I don't know what's come to young chaps nowadays," Mr. Blunt had said. "You haven't none o' you got what I call the making of men about you——don't think of sweetheartin', nor nothing o' that kind, it seems to me."

"Oh, there's time enough for me yet," Christopher would reply pacifically.

"Time enough for you! and what about me, I should like to know; ain't I to see those that's coming after me. It don't seem so very much for a father to ask of a son to take a wife, so that he may have his grandchildren round about his knee."

That was Mr. Blunt's desire, the wish which had

taken possession of his life, to see his grandchildren—to be able to look beyond Christopher and make sure that, come what might, there would be those belonging to him to have what he must leave behind. The knowledge that his son was delicate—although to himself he refused to admit that such was the case—but added to his anxiety, and a chief motive in letting him go to see Mr. Veriker had been that it would shake him up a bit—take him out of leading-strings—make him more of a man than he was now.

Mr. Blunt could better have excused a life of excess than the one of unostentatious retirement towards which Christopher was disposed.

Between father and son a constant struggle went on: the one pushing forward, the other as resolutely holding back.

Mr. Blunt would have had Christopher attend every ball and meeting, far and near; he wanted him to put his name down for every club in the county.

Christopher, on the other hand, could hardly be induced to pay a call, and if he saw certain of his neighbors coming, he would go a mile out of his way to avoid them. That love of display in which Mr. Blunt delighted was torture to his son—to be thrust into notice because of their equipage and fine liveries humiliated him.

There was but one man in Wadpole with whom he was sufficiently intimate to call him a friend, and he, to his father's disgust, was a new comer and the curate.

"You haven't no spirit in you," Mr. Blunt would say; "instead of trying to get in with those that could be of some use to you. What's the good of a fellow like that!"

It was not that he had any especial dislike to Mr. Cameron, but he wanted to have his vanity ministered to by seeing Christopher mix with those in whose company he himself could never feel at ease. When his son was on horseback, Mr. Blunt was riding; in whatever he did the father had a share, and followed with

pride that portion of himself which had always been well fed and clothed and nursed in luxury. The greater half of much ambition has root in a similar selfish prompting.

During the time Christopher had been in Venice, Mr. Blunt had been taking his pleasure in London, thoroughly enjoying the fellowship of some of his old companions, indemnifying his apparent forgetfulness of them in the country by the generous treatment he gave them in town.

The letter announcing that Christopher was returning had sent him back to Wadpole, and a telegram a few days later on, saying the hour to expect him, took Mr. Blunt off to the station.

Few things put him in better humor than a drive through the little town of Wadpole—a sleepy, out-of-the-world, old-fashioned place which, though but a short distance from London, seemed, so far as progress went, to have been overlooked or forgotten.

There was one main street, composed of substantial dwelling-houses mixed up with shops kept by well-to-do folk, who with their business inherited their customers, and on market-days when the country people came in and the farmers were about, there was a little show of bustle here; but at ordinary times the noise of carriage-wheels brought people to their doors and windows, and Mr. Blunt was greeted with the obsequious salutations due to such horses and such liveries.

"That was something like! something worth looking at; a man who'd got the money and knew how to spend it—and spent it among them too, which was more than Mr. Chandos did"—their own Squire—a very unpopular man, who seldom of late years had cared to do more than pay a visit to Wadpole.

However much the neighboring gentry might give the cold shoulder to Mr. Blunt, in Wadpole itself he had secured the popularity usually awarded to one whose advent is heralded by fabulous wealth, wonder-

ful speculations, and an enviable facility of turning all he touched into money.

No one could tell exactly how, but there was a general belief that Mr. Blunt's coming meant some good to the town, and various hints were given and reports exchanged, as down the whole length of the street they watched him out of sight.

Then the coachman permitted the horses to slacken their pace; they had but to cross the wooden bridge, mount the short, steep hill, and the station would be reached.

No longer satisfied with the pent-house shelter, which up to now had served well enough, public spirit, aided by a handsome subscription from Mr. Blunt, had demanded a proper waiting-room, which was now in course of erection, together with the offices which should form a respectable terminus.

None of these being yet fully finished, Mr. Blunt remained seated in his carriage, an object of admiration to the few persons waiting about, none of whom being of sufficient importance to engage in conversation, his attention was caught by some workmen occupied—and very busily, too, since the great man had drawn near—in completing the masonry of a boundary wall. A mischance had caused the train to be late, and as the time went on Mr. Blunt became more and more engrossed in the work he was watching.

Country fellows who had learnt their trade in the little town near to which they had been born, how clumsily they managed their tools! If it was in that slipshod way that the work was to be done, the whole thing would be down in pieces about their ears before a year was out.

There was one man who particularly stirred his wrath, a happy-go-lucky lout who kept time in the dabbing-in of his mortar to some doleful composition which he slowly whistled.

Oh, the purgatory of having to look on and to sit still!

At that moment Mr. Blunt would not have grudged a good sum to be able to jump from the carriage, pull off his coat, and knocking the five bumpkins to the right-about, give them a sight of what well-done, proper work ought to look like. He had not forgotten his tools, or how to handle them either.

Did any one suppose that if he had ever scamped his work in that fashion, he should be where he was now? and before his eyes there rose up a poor boy carrying a mason's hod on his shoulder.

In an instant Mr. Blunt's rubicund face had turned crimson; it was as if he felt that others must have seen that vision, and have recognized that long ago he was that boy.

Casting his eyes sharply round, he fancied he detected a snigger on those stolid faces near, that they exchanged meaning looks, guessed perhaps why he was interested in the progress of that wall.

"What, I should like to know, is the meaning of all this delay?"

Mr. Blunt's comely appearance was as ruffled as an angry turkey-cock's.

"Where's the station-master? Oh, Mr. Watkins, there you are."

"It's a little hitch with the Bocking train, sir," said Watkins, coming forward; "they got stuck fast by Greentree, but it's all right now, they've signalled us past, they'll soon be here. I was waiting to tell you, but I see you was noting how they are getting on here —slow work it seems to me."

Torn between the desire to point out the defects of the work and the fear of displaying too much knowledge of it, Mr. Blunt hesitated, when fortunately a diversion occurred in the shape of a new arrival; a high sort of butcher's cart with a rough pony, driven by a bright-looking girl, dashed up to the station.

"Am I in time?" she said, standing up so as to look on the platform over Mr. Blunt. "Down train not in yet? that is good! Watkins," to the station-master,

"come here; I want a parcel sent. How d'ye do, Mr. Blunt? I was so afraid I shouldn't do it;" and as she looked at her watch she gave a nod of satisfaction. Then in a graver tone, seeming to address all who were near, she said, "You will be sorry, I am sure, to hear that the Squire has been taken ill—the rector had no idea that it was anything serious when he went to London, but the account yesterday was so unfavorable that he has determined to go on to Brighton from there; and these are some things, Watkins, I want taken up to meet him at Victoria Station. Lambert will be able to manage it for me; don't you think?"

"If it's anything for you, Miss Georgy, he'll do it if it's to be done," said Watkins, heartily.

"Of course he will," and the girl's face reflected the smiles turned towards her; "it's of no use having friends unless one makes use of them, is it, Mr. Blunt?" and without waiting his answer she asked, "Are you here to meet your son? I heard he was expected to-day."

"Yes; I fancy he must be in a hurry to get home. I wanted him to take it easy and stay by the way, but he's come straight back from Italy. I'm sorry to hear this about Mr. Chandos, though. Is it sudden, or anything he's subject to?"

"Papa does not say, but he evidently thinks seriously of it, and the rector isn't one to look at the dark side of things, you know."

While speaking, she had jumped down unassisted, and stood looking about for some one to entrust her pony to.

"Shall I—would you like my footman?" Mr. Blunt hesitated. His footman had but recently come from the service of an earl. Dare he venture to ask him to descend thus far?

"Thanks; oh, dear no. Stop where you are," she said, taking it for granted the man intended at once acting on his master's suggestion. "I see somebody

who has been looking out for me," and she nodded affirmatively to an old fellow who, at a little distance off, stood pulling his forelock in anticipation.

"I shall go on to the platform," she said, "and interview Lambert myself."

Mr. Blount had already got down from the carriage with the gallant idea of being able to assist her.

"I don't think I can do better than follow your example," he said. "The train must be close at hand by this time."

So going round and through the wicket they went chatting one to the other, and when a few minutes later the engine came puffing in, Christopher, looking out of the carriage window, was greeted by his father and Miss Georgy Temple standing side by side together.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN, on that late October afternoon, after driving back from the station, Christopher reached home, he felt as if he had never before thoroughly appreciated the comforts by which he was surrounded. The house was so warm, the fires looked so cheerful, the rooms so well furnished, that a feeling of satisfaction stole over him—a feeling which involuntarily gave birth to the thought that perhaps the possession of all this might have some weight with Robin.

Thus far his father and he had spoken but little of her. Mr. Blunt, amazed at the improvement in his son's condition, at first could do nothing but comment on it.

"Why, I do believe that that's the place to make a man of you, Chris," he exclaimed, his face beaming with satisfaction. "You look pounds to the good from what you did when you went away. You must be weighed to-morrow; you've gained flesh, that's certain: managed to put something more than skin on your bones this time, anyway."

"They told me I was looking ever so much better than when I came," Christopher replied.

"Better! You're not the same. I say, young chap, I tell you what it is: the next time there's any need of a doctor, instead of calling one in I shall start you off to this Venice again."

"Oh, I don't know that all the credit's due to Venice. There's something in the care they've taken of me there."

"They were glad to see you, then?"

"Very glad. Mr. Veriker was never tired of saying how good it was of you to send me to him."

Mr. Blunt puffed himself out like a pigeon. "I was glad to see by the letters you wrote me, that my gentleman's come to his senses again. Poverty's taught him which side his bread's buttered on, and he's learnt the lesson, upstart that he used to be!"

"You'd find him greatly changed now," said Christopher, eager to divert the conversation.

"Ah, ah! I've no doubt I should," and Mr. Blunt accompanied his laugh by a wink of the eye. "Nothing alters people more than having to come down on their marrow-bones."

"I feel certain he won't last long," said Christopher, gravely. "It seemed to me as if I saw death written on his face when I said 'Good-bye' to him."

Mr. Blunt might have said that he was not sorry to hear it, but a superstitious dread of what must some day overtake himself made him answer:

"Ah, well; he won't leave many behind to be sorry for him."

"There's his daughter."

"Oh yes, of course."

Mr. Blunt felt that decency would oblige the daughter to assume some show of sorrow, although it was not incumbent on him to credit her with feeling it.

"What's she like to look at, eh! You had her photo taken, I hope."

Christopher winced. It pained him to have to describe Robin.

"Yes; but I won't tell you about her until you have seen it, then you can give me your opinion."

"All right, you shall have it. I used to be thought a fairish judge of a good-looking woman."

"Then after dinner I'll fetch it down. We shall be by ourselves then, and I can tell you all about them. It's no use beginning now and having to leave off again."

This arrangement meeting with Mr. Blunt's approval, the conversation during dinner, while the servants were present, was confined to descriptions of the places which Christopher had seen, more especially of Venice and its wonderful buildings, in the accounts of which Mr. Blunt was much interested. He, in turn, related all the home news, more especially that which, while awaiting at the station, Miss Georgy Temple had put him in possession of.

Miss Temple was the eldest unmarried daughter of the rector of Wadpole—a cousin of Mr. Chandos, the Squire, who was lying ill. Wadpole was a poor living, but Mr. Temple—in early days a gay collegian—had little else left now but its income to live on. Both he and his wife belonged to good old families, and in spite of the very droll *ménage* they kept, they mixed with, and were welcome guests at, the best houses in the county. Every one said that Nature had intended Georgy Temple—a fair young Amazon of twenty-two—for a man, and she, sighing over the mistake, did her best to rectify it. She rode and drove more fearlessly than any woman for thirty miles round, and if these accomplishments were not maintained with all the grace desired, she excused it under the plea that she always meant business when she went out.

"I hate them to feel obliged to remember that I am a woman," she would say; and she used to tell with triumph of a certain fox-loving squire who, on a day when she had come to grief, and lay doubled up study-

ing the sky on the flat of her back, constrained by the sight of a habit, to jump off his horse and offer help, exclaimed, "Oh, it's you, is it!" and was on and away before she could reply, saving the others from a like delay by shouting back, "Come on, it's only Georgy Temple."

Miss Temple had a certain familiarity with sport of all kinds. She would go out with a rod when there was nothing better to do, and shoulder a gun if her father needed a companion. In a fit of generosity the Squire had given her a horse, and there was the family pony to which was attached the cart in which she had driven to the station.

'Miss Temple, by what she was saying, seemed to fancy the rector thought very seriously of what's the matter with the Squire," said Mr. Blunt, continuing to retail scraps of the conversation. "He's not so young as he used to be," he added; "and at that time of life anything sudden is likely to go hard, I should say."

"Let me see," said Christopher, trying to recall what he had heard about him, for since they had come the Squire had been but little seen in Wadpole; "he hasn't any children, has he?"

"No, never has married; always was going to be, but somehow it never came off. He's got a nephew he brought up, but he quarrelled with him. Terrible thing for a man to be on his death-bed and nobody he can call his own to leave his money to," and Mr. Blunt sighed lugubriously. He sympathized acutely with such a situation.

"There are the Temples," said Christopher. "I'm sure they want it badly, and they are his cousins, aren't they?"

"Cousins!" repeated Mr. Blunt contemptuously. "What if they are? I've got cousins, haven't I?" and turning his head to see that the servants had not reappeared, he added: "but to think that the Tappses or the Perkinses would be the better for all I cut up for, would that be any satisfaction to

me, I should like to know? Not a bit of it. It must be somebody who's bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh, and bears your name, so that if you ain't in it, you ain't, as in the other way, gone altogether—straight wiped out o' the whole concern;" and for a few moments Mr. Blunt remained silent, as if appalled by the consideration of such a disaster. "And it's something of that sort that makes me set on your marrying," he began, feeling that this was a fitting moment to speak seriously to Christopher. "Here you are up six-and-twenty years old, and with not so much as your eye fixed on anybody. Well, that mustn't go on."

"Why? You did not marry until you were past my age," said Christopher.

"And for good reason too. I'd got to work to maintain my wife. I hadn't the luck o' some people to have a father born before me to make a fortune that I was only asked to spend, or, if so, I'd have done all you've got to do; I'd have taken my pick and held up my finger. There'd have been plenty to follow it then as now."

"In my case I don't know where the 'plenty' would be," and Christopher spoke despondingly. "I've never seen any girl anxious to marry me yet."

"Why, bless my soul, you don't expect 'em to be jumping down your throat before you've opened your mouth, do you? Anybody, to listen to you, 'ud think I'd got to deal with a born fool. Here, where's this likeness I'm to see? If I'm to look at it to-night you'd better go and fetch it." Mr. Blunt felt his temper rising, and the only way of restraining it was to change the topic. "And what is it you have to tell me about Veriker? Nothing very agreeable, I dare say."

Christopher thought it wiser to go for the photograph without more delay. He had a thought that the sight of Robin's face might restore his father's good-humor.

"It's no use," he said, taking it out of the box where it lay, and pressing it close to him. "It would

be hoping against hope. She couldn't endure it. It would kill her to listen to the things he would be certain to say of her father.

Meantime, Mr. Blunt, left to himself, seized the opportunity of mentally protesting against the conduct of his son. "If I could only make him out," he said, "what he wants: what he's after," and he rubbed away at his bald pate as if fairly beaten by a mystery to which he could find no solution. Christopher's footsteps made him alter his position.

"There she is," he said, laying the portrait before his father. "Look," and he pointed his finger to the name—"'Robin Veriker,' do you see she has written it underneath for you?"

"H'm! Is it like?"

"Exactly like—only not half so pretty."

Christopher was looking over the old man's shoulder; he could not see the expression of his face.

"She's good-looking then?" he asked craftily.

"Good-looking!" Christopher repeated with a tender rippling of the words. "What do you think? I expected to hear you call the face lovely, beautiful."

"Here, I say!" Mr. Blunt, looking up, turned suddenly round, but not before Christopher had time to draw back into his shell. "There's nothing up between you two I hope, is there?"

"Up—between us two!" Christopher had gone round to the other side of the table. "I don't know what you mean," he added.

"Why, that—that vagabond hasn't been baiting a trap with this good-looking daughter of his, and you've been caught in it, eh? Come, I've got a pretty sharp nose for a scent of that kind."

"So you may have, but in this case it has led you rather astray, I fancy." And the tone of his voice—a tone which he seldom used, but which his father perfectly knew—betrayed that the vexation he felt was greater than he desired to show. When this mood was on him, Mr. Blunt had a suspicion that he was no match

for his son, so in a somewhat apologetic manner he said:

"Well, after all, I don't know that it would have been anything to wonder at if they had tried it on. Veriker might have thought I'd only myself to blame for letting you go; it isn't every father, I can tell you, would have trusted his son there."

"You knew your son was to be trusted." Christopher spoke coldly.

"Well, yes, wherever there's a girl in the question I believe he is," and he laughed discontentedly; and then he took up Robin's likeness and fell to examining it again. "She's a uncommon good-looking girl," he said after a time; "more of the father, though, than the mother in her; doesn't take after her aunt at all that I can see."

This last sentence, put as an interrogative, Christopher felt bound to answer.

"No," he said; "in appearance she does not remind me in the smallest degree, but in disposition I think there is a great similarity—her ways are something the same, and the manner she has of attending on her father. I was often put in mind of the days when anything ailed either of us, how the one after whom she's named would wait on us."

"Ah!" and Mr. Blunt gave vent to a prolonged sigh, "the one she's named after was one in a hundred —a hundred! a thousand I might better say. Never fear, Christopher, you and I ain't likely ever to see two Robina Blunts in our day."

"No, indeed," and Christopher echoed the sigh from the very bottom of his heart; "I fear we never shall."

"She was such a sensible woman, clear-sighted and clever! Bless me, I never wanted to seek any other companion while she was in the way. I used to talk o her by the hour together, and there she'd sit and listen, delighted with all I'd got to say."

Sad martyrdom! Was she, who bore it, now reaping the fruit of all the sacrifices to duty she had made below?

"Robin is very like her in that respect, I should fancy."

Oh, Christopher, how wily love is teaching you to be!

"H'm! that's how a woman should be, not wanting to hear her own tongue running all day long."

"Yes; but that's too much the way with most of them."

"You're pretty right there, and the higher you go the more sound you get."

Mr. Blunt remained silent awhile—reviewing in thought the different girls he knew.

"I should fancy our neighbor here, Miss Georgy Temple, was a pretty good hand at letting her clapper run."

He had come from the station impressed with the idea that he should like Miss Georgy for a daughter-in-law.

Christopher smiled.

"I expect they'll be looking rather high for her now, if by chance the Squire should leave them anything. She was his favorite, I know."

Ah, Mr. Blunt hadn't thought of that. There'd be one, if not the best, knocked off his list. There were some Miss Pakingtons, a Miss Twysden, and two or three more. Paupers! who looked down their noses when they met him. He dared say they'd be glad enough to marry his son if they thought they'd the chance, but whoever married Christopher would have to saddle horses with him. He was master of his own house, and intended to remain so; and drawing himself together as if to assert his position, his eyes fell again on the photograph.

"What does the father expect me to do for her?" he asked, indicating by his finger to whom he was referring.

"He doesn't expect anything from you while he lives—at least he has never said so."

"Does he think himself that he's dying?"

"He seems to feel certain that he shan't live long. When I spoke two or three times of his coming to England, he always shook his head and said he should never see England again, and that's what makes him so anxious about Robin. He might drop down in the street—a fit of excitement would kill him any day—and then she'd be left absolutely destitute, with not a penny to call her own, and, except us, not a creature to turn to."

"Ah, yes, that's the way with all these high and mighty gentry. You ain't thought fit to put your legs under the same table with 'em while they're alive, but you're good enough to look after their children when they're dead and have spent every blessed sixpence that ought to go for the keeping 'em."

"Well, but the children can't help that. It's not their fault. I'm sure, in Robin Veriker's case, she looks at every penny before she spends it. She always would ask if I could afford any little trifle I wanted to buy her, and at first I had quite a tussle to make her accept anything."

"Well, I don't think any the worse of her for that. It shows she isn't one of the sponging order, and has a proper independent spirit."

"She has plenty of that, I can tell you. Nothing would please her better than to earn her own living. She was always asking, if they came to England, what she could find to do."

"Has he had her taught anything, then?"

"Oh, she sings beautifully!"—Christopher was growing enthusiastic—"and she chatters away in French and Italian like a native. I didn't ask her if she could paint, but I dare say she can. She seemed to me to be able to do everything."

Mr. Blunt gave a pleased chuckle.

"I say," he said, "she'd rather take the shine out of a few about here, I fancy."

"I should say she would!" said Christopher.

"And yet she don't seem to have struck it off with

you. You don't seem to have been much taken with her? Why, bless me, at your age, if I'd been thrown much with a girl who'd got a face like that," and he held up the photograph admiringly, "I don't know what might have happened to me."

"It's well for you, then, that I'm not so inflammable," and Christopher laughed a little confusedly.

"How well for me?" exclaimed his father.

"Why, I can hardly suppose you want me to have anything to do with Mr. Veriker's daughter."

"I'm not quite sure of that, since I've heard what you've told me. According to your account, it seems pretty certain that he's got one leg in the grave already. Well, when the other gets there, we shan't have him to trouble us."

"Oh, time enough to think of that," said Christopher hurriedly, "when he's gone and she is here."

"Oh yes; dilly-dally, and let some one else step in before you. That's your way. That's you all over. A girl situated like her can't afford to pick and choose like you can. The first man that offers she must say 'yes' to."

A terrible dread seized on Christopher that such might be the case. How he wished he had opened his heart to Mr. Veriker.

"I don't know about dilly-dallying," he began, slowly; "but before one thinks of marrying a person, you begin to wonder if——" and here he stopped.

"Well," said his father, impatiently, "you begin to wonder if—what? Whether you care enough for them, I s'pose. That's just the question I want to know. How do you feel about this girl? D'ye like her? D'ye think you ever could like her?—Come, now's the time; let's have your answer, and then I shall know how to act and what to expect."

"As for liking her, it's not a question of that with me." He had taken up the poker, and seemed to find his speech assisted by making savage thrusts with it between the bars. "No man could be with her without liking her."

"Oh, oh! that's the upshot of it all, is it? The cat seems out of the bag at last. Well," and his eyes twinkled with pleasure, "I'll do the thing handsome by her: I'll write to her father."

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Christopher.

Mr. Blunt turned a look of blank astonishment on him.

"No; most certainly not," he added, decisively. "It's one thing," he went on, hurriedly, "for me to care for her; it's another that I should suppose she cares for me."

A burst of imprecations deafened Christopher. *His son!* not cared for by that scoundrel's, that swindler's, that pauper's daughter! Oh, he must try and calm himself, or he should be carried off by a fit of apoplexy. In a moment Christopher saw he had been led into making a false movement. How should he rectify it?

"You seem to forget," he said, "all you said to me before I started. The very first evening I got there, I said we would consider each other as brother and sister."

"And if you did, what's that got to do with it?"

"Everything. Knowing your prejudice against them, it never entered my head to think you would sanction anything more, and certainly because you seem to have changed your opinions, I don't choose to be flung at the head of the girl, and accepted for the reason that I am the first person who has asked her to marry him."

There was some truth in this argument, and Mr. Blunt began to be mollified.

"Oh, well," he said, "if that's all—that you haven't played the spoony enough with her—I've got no more to say. You can do that in writing, though, can't you?"

"No, I can't," said Christopher, shortly.

"The devil's in it; you don't want to go there again,

do you? Oh, well, if so, I shan't stop you. You may go to blazes, I was going to say, only that you seem to have hit on old Harry's daughter without it taking you quite so far away."

CHAPTER XVII.

THIS subject of marriage between Christopher and Robin, once mooted, began to take a wonderful hold of Mr. Blunt's fancy; the more he reflected on it the better the idea pleased him. Such an arrangement would rid him of that father-in-law whom he had always pictured as prying into his affairs; there would be no need of settlements; the bride could be easily taught her place, and he be spared the necessity of having to keep up company manners before her.

His anxiety now was to bring matters to a close; a dread seized him lest Robin should be snapped up, and he did nothing but urge the necessity of action upon Christopher.

"Why don't you pack up and start off at once? I should," he would say.

"But I am only just back," with assumed reluctance Christopher would reply; and for a moment Mr. Blunt had to swallow down his impatience, to return to the attack with:

"Well, then, write a letter to the girl, and let her have a hint of what you mean to do."

"Oh, no—things of that sort can't be written about; besides, until I get there, I don't quite know. I should like to see her again before I make up my mind what I mean to say."

"Tch! make up your mind! While you're about that, some Mossoo will step in—that'll be the end of it, I can see."

"And why not?—all the better if she cares for him more than for me."

"What the devil does it matter who *she* cares for?"

roared the old man; "the question is, do you care for her? if so, have her, if you don't, leave her."

But to the choice of this alternative, Mr. Blunt could get no reply; and prompted by his own desires, and the assurance he gave himself that, should Christopher alter his mind, he could make it up to Robin in some way—unknown to his son, he wrote to Mr. Veriker, desiring that he would not give his countenance to any suitor who might come in their way, as he believed that his son Christopher had taken a sort of fancy to Robin, and though—as no doubt Mr. Veriker would feel—it wasn't exactly the kind of choice he cared to see, rather than put an obstacle in the way of his son's happiness, he had given his consent, and that before long Christopher would probably pay them another visit,and,as he supposed say what he had to say.

This was the gist of the letter, mixed up with much vulgar condescension, patronage, and pity that read so like scorn, that Mr. Veriker was made furious by it, the effect rendered worse, because he had no one to confide it to. If he showed to Robin what the old ruffian said, she would starve rather than be beholden to him for bread; if he wrote and told Christopher, he was perhaps destroying the only friend she had left. Mr. Blunt had bade him take no notice of the letter. Mr. Veriker felt that silence was the wisest, but at the same time the hardest course to pursue.

Brooding on the indignity offered him—for Mr. Blunt had been mindful to take out in condescension the long score he had against his ancient enemy—all the old bitterness was stirred up afresh, and the calmness and quiet of mind which was his only chance of life destroyed by the ferment set up within him. Dead! a thousand times rather would he see Robin dead than leave her to the scant mercy of that old monster! and—finding some pretext to send her out, in order that he might be alone—he would pace the room to and fro, seeking for a way to revenge himself without letting the blow aimed be dealt through

Christopher. Robin, returning, would find him worn out—the fiery spirit had consumed the strength of the failing body—and hardly able to speak or move, during the rest of the day he would lie silent, following her about with wistful eyes that pierced her through with sorrow. And then the agony of those evenings, when in the dark, because he had a disposition to sleep, Robin sat—his hands clasped in hers—the victim of a hundred vague alarms: he wasn't breathing! and she was all but choked by the tumult of her heart, forced into making some slight noise that by rousing him would still this wild terror, or a ray of light across his face would show all its haggard lines and make them strike her afresh; the deep-set eyes, the temples sunken in each side, the hollow cheeks, the drawn, set mouth.

"Papa!" the word seemed wrung from out her lips.

"What is it? Yes, my dear."

"Nothing; I thought—I heard you speak—to—me." All Robin's breath had died away, she had no power to say more; and her father sinking back into a drowsy state, the conflict with her fears began, and had to be gone through as before.

Christopher no longer with them—without a friend near to whom she could go for counsel or advice—what should she do? That her father was ill, very ill, she felt sure—twice lately he had had slight returns of that terrible pain. Once while Robin was out, the people from below had come up to find him faint; they had been attracted by the noise of something falling on the floor. Surely he ought to have a doctor! But the bare mention of calling one in made him angry with her.

"Never wait again," she said to the man who kept the house; "the next time he is ill send off at once for any doctor near; when he is fetched to him he cannot say no."

And therefore it was that some days later, the landlord, Giacomuzzi—who, with an Italian's dread of

death, longed to get them out of his house—at the first symptom of alarm rushed off for his family physician, who happened to live close at hand.

Chance directed that the old man called in had had a wider experience than many of his fellows, and when he was there, Mr. Veriker had not the strength nor the energy to protest against his presence; he answered his questions, accepted his prescription, and made a sign that Robin should pay him his fee and send him away.

"He has some distress of mind, something that is agitating him just now—is it not so?" asked the doctor, closing the door behind Robin that her father might not hear.

"No," she said; "nothing that I know of."

"But yes; there is something that I see. Try and discover what, and remove it, if you can It is his only chance of life, that of being quiet and not agitated in any way."

"Wait," she said; "come downstairs—I want to speak to you," and together they went into the tiny bureau below; and some minutes later, the doctor having gone, Robin came out to go upstairs again.

Madame Giacomuzzi, who had a soft heart embedded in that mountain of flesh which constituted her body, took her hand and squeezed it sympathetically. "Poor child! poor child!" she murmured, and Robin thanked her with a smile. The woman was crying; her dark eyes were humid and wet: but Robin's were hot and dry; she could find no tears to ease her sorrow.

The next day a letter from Christopher arrived. Mr. Veriker, recovered from his attack, which had been but a slight one, read it and laid it on one side, expecting that Robin would question him about it, but to his astonishment she seemed to take no notice.

"Don't you want to hear what he says, Bobby?" he asked, with a faint attempt at his old humor.

"When you want to tell me, I do," and she came

over and knelt down by his side, "I want to hear all your secrets, papa."

"My secrets, child?"

"Yes; all those that trouble you—you have some that give you trouble, haven't you? Haven't you had some worry lately, within the last ten days—something you have kept to yourself and haven't told me?" She was speaking very fast; her face had grown flushed and earnest; she had thrown her arms across her father's neck, and was resting her chin on his breast. "Papa, don't do this; speak out to me." Involuntarily she closed her eyes for a moment; her nostrils were dilated, her hands tightened, until the nails seemed plunged into the palms. "The doctor has told me all," she said, "so there is nothing I cannot bear to hear from you;" and relaxing from the strain she had put upon herself, she let her head slide down, and there it lay, nestled and half hidden in her father's silky beard.

Had either of them—he, in his all but fifty years; she in her seventeen short summers—ever sent up a cry so earnest as that which now implored that they might go together. What mattered death if neither were left behind to sorrow? Parting was death.

"O child!"

"O father!"

And there they lay, clasped close together, until the best part of an hour had passed; and then, little by little, Mr. Veriker began to ease the weight of his distress by telling part of its cause to his daughter. He spoke at first in short broken sentences, ejaculations—if he could but see her settled, provided for—that ascertained, and he should be happy—nay, he believed he should be well—for it was only when he could not rid himself of anxiety that he felt ill.

"See how well I was," he said, "when Christopher was with us."

Robin sighed.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "how I wish he would come

again !" and immediately her thoughts grew busy as to what inducement she could hold out to bring Christopher back to them, so that she was not struck by the long pause before her father's next sentence came.

"That letter," he said with an effort, "is to tell me he is coming."

"Coming! What, coming here—soon—now at once, papa ?"

Her nerveless limbs seemed to have regained their strength. She was still kneeling by his side, but by this time with her face aglow, her head erect.

O Youth, how strong hope dwells in you! In that moment Robin saw her father raised up, made well and strong, and—all by Christopher's return

"Did you ask him to come ?"

"No, my dear."

Something in the tone struck her.

"Did his father tell you in that letter you had from him ?"

Mr. Veriker's look made assent.

"And you did not tell me, papa. Why did you not tell me ?"

"Oh, I was afraid that perhaps you might think it too great a sacrifice."

"What a sacrifice ?" and she fixed her eyes on her father inquiringly.

"Well, he—indeed, both of them—they want you to marry Christopher."

"Marry Christopher ?" the words dropped down on Robin's heart like lead. "Yes; and if I did ?"

"Oh, my dear, if you did, there would be an end to all my anxiety. With somebody to look after you, and plenty of money for you to spend, I should have nothing more to worry over."

"And is it this, then, that has been worrying you ?" she asked earnestly.

"How could it be otherwise, seeing how friendless I leave you."

"Hush! don't talk of leaving me. If I married

Christopher, and you had everything you wanted, you would get well, wouldn't you?"

He shook his head.

"I don't know," he said doubtfully. "At times I think I might. I'm not quite tired of life yet, somehow."

"And when we could go where we pleased and have whatever was good for you without any care of money, why, you would soon be all right. The doctor told me so."

"Did he?" he said hopefully. "The remedy does not sound half bad; it strikes me as rather jolly," and the old smile lit up his wan face again. "And you, Bobby, you are not tired of your old father yet, eh, are you?"

"Tired!" she said, and as the dread of losing him swept over her, she flung herself down, buried her head, and wept passionately.

"Child! don't, don't!" he murmured, and the sound of his voice roused Robin to control herself.

"I don't know why I am crying," she sobbed. "I —am—sure there is nothing to cry for. I am very glad to marry Christopher—very glad—indeed—that he has asked me."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHRISTOPHER at this time was already half-way on his journey back to Venice, his starting speeded by a conversation in which Mr. Blunt betrayed that he had taken upon himself to write to Mr. Veriker.

Poor fellow! his task was by no means a pleasant one, for with his eyes refusing to remain blind to his ostentation and vulgarities, Mr. Blunt was his father, and Christopher held it a sacred duty to screen from others failings which made much in his own life bitter.

Absence, without in any way diminishing his love,

had tempered the heat of its fire, and with a full sense of the happiness he was giving up, he felt secure in his own strength to study only what should be best for Robin's future welfare.

Before leaving home he had written a letter registering a promise not only to watch over Robin, but by an income which she should believe she derived from her father, to provide her with means of support. More fluent as a writer than as a speaker, he had very touchingly alluded to his love, its hopelessness, and the pain he knew he must suffer. Yet he was willing to give up Robin without even asking her, because circumstances might induce her to make a choice which her later judgment might repent.

With this letter ready to give Mr. Veriker, Christopher arrived in Venice, and was—unexpected by them—ushered into the presence of the father and daughter. Robin was ready to go out. Mr. Veriker had but just come down. Both were effusively warm in their welcome of him. Only a few weeks had elapsed since they had parted, yet what a change he saw in both! The first look at Mr. Veriker came on him as a shock; Robin's pale cheeks and tired eyes struck him with dismay. The very weather, too, seemed in harmony. It was cold and wet; fogs hung low over the canals; the sky was no longer sunny.

"I wish I had you both in England," he could not help saying, contrasting the cheerless room with the comforts he had left behind him; "the houses there are so warm and cosy."

Mr. Veriker looked round him, and gave a little shiver.

"What do you say," he said to Robin; "shall we go back with Christopher?"

She tried to smile assent. What was this that had come over her? Only that morning she had awakened full of desire that Christopher would come—come soon, so that they would be married and get away from here so that her father would be stronger. He had had a

slight attack the night before; now, at first sight, the instant her eyes fell upon Christopher, she was oppressed by a desire to escape, to run away out of his sight, out of his reach—anywhere.

"I think, if you don't mind, Christopher, as I was going for something, it is best for me still to go."

"O God! send me strength to give her up," was Christopher's cry; for a look at her face, the sound of her voice, had wakened the love which slept but to arouse refreshed. What should he do? How battle with the temptation which was now so near him?

"Yes, my dear, do," said Mr. Veriker. "It's some drops I take. You won't be long gone. It's only to Zamperini's," he explained to Christopher.

Christopher opened the door, watched her down, and then returning, seated himself near Mr. Veriker.

"I am so glad to have you alone!" he said. "I wanted to give you this," and he handed him the letter, "and to speak to you. You know why I have come, but what does she think has brought me?"

"She knows," said Mr. Veriker.

"Knows! You didn't show her my father's letter?"

"Hardly. Your father was a little plain-spoken, my dear fellow; but I told her his wishes, and that his wishes were yours also."

For the life of him Christopher could not get out the words which would ask Robin's reply, and the mention of Mr. Blunt's letter had set Mr. Veriker's heart beating, so that his breath came with difficulty.

"What a confounded nuisance this is—directly I begin to speak," he said irritably. "I wanted to tell you all about it—how it came round, and what she said—but—I can't do it. It won't let me," and he put up his hand as if he was in pain.

"Don't try yourself. Never mind; only, what was her answer? Tell me that." Christopher's effort to speak seem as great as Mr. Veriker's.

"Oh, all right: as I thought—she likes you very much; seems quite taken with the idea of marrying you."

Were his senses going? Did it mean *that*, this buzzing in his ears and swaying of everything before his eyes? Christopher was experiencing all the first distress of fainting. Mr. Veriker was still speaking to him when he seemed come to himself again. He felt for his handkerchief; a cold sweat stood on his forehead.

"It has taken you by surprise, poor lad," Mr. Veriker said sympathetically. "Well, I confess it did me a little; and I'm an old stager, you'll say, and ought to be pretty well up in the caprices of women. But they're unfathomable, you know. I've often told you so;" and to seem more at his ease, for the way Christopher had taken what he said embarrassed him, he essayed to whistle "La Donna e Mobile," and failed signally.

Without speaking, Christopher got up suddenly, and took a turn up and down the room. Coming back to Mr. Veriker, he said:

"It's impossible that she can love me. She doesn't, does she?"

"Love! Well, she's a little young to know much about love. That's a lesson for you to teach her, it seems to me."

Christopher shook his head.

"I can't help feeling it is taking an unfair advantage," he said. "She has taught me what love is, and yet I am going to deprive her of liberty."

"How liberty?" said Mr. Veriker quickly.

"The liberty of choice. She cannot have that if she is tied to me, and reason will no more listen to her saying 'Love Christopher,' than it did to me saying 'Don't love Robin.' No, no," and he sighed heavily; "I must put away the temptation, and you—you must help me. Don't let her ever have reason to say that the two who loved her best wrought her the greatest misery."

Mr. Veriker looked away, and Christopher went on:

"In that letter you will see what I have promised

you to do for her, and in time I shall have more at my command; and if I find that it will make her happy to share it with—another, I will treat her as you would have done. Only let me leave her free. Help me," he added earnestly. "You must; for I am much stronger when she is away than when she is near me?"

Mr. Veriker raised his head. Christopher had bent his down on the chair-back, his face was hidden from view. There was a look of awe in the weary world-worn eyes which Mr. Veriker turned upon him. What was it he felt? Not admiration. We must in a way comprehend to admire, and no experience of his, or of anyone he had ever known, enabled him to gauge the spirit of sacrifice shown by Christopher. Hitherto, fond as he felt of him, he had accepted much of the kindness shown him with a certain easy complacency, feeling that if he had not spent his money in that way he would have in some other—"One of those fellows who build asylums for deceased blind beggar men's dogs and send out books to the blacks who can't read 'em," he would say descriptively, when drawing a picture of his newly-found relation. The charity, morality and many other good qualities which Christopher had shown, were but further instances of his weakness; and when Robin, struck by the fact, had wondered how it was that Christopher had grown up so good, Mr. Veriker had made answer that "he expected he couldn't help it; that he had been born so," and his vague surmise found point in the laugh which followed, and which gave thanks that a like calamity had not befallen him.

But the last few weeks of bodily pain and mental suffering had wrought as great a change internally as it had to the visible eye. Through those long, sleepless nights, how many hours had he dragged out in groping, trying to lay hold of something to cling to, and finding all fail him—in none of them support. Books worried him; newspapers, novels—once enjoyed with keen relish—now fell flat, flavorless. He did not want

to hear of the world he was forced to turn his back upon, yet he was tormented by a vague unsatisfied craving. Was it to hear something of that other world, the one he said he had no belief in, which a voice he could not still kept whispering he was fast hastening to?

Christopher believed in that life to come. In spite of being laughed at, he had often spoken to him of his faith in it. Did the belief make him act as he was acting now? A glimmer of consciousness that man had been imaged after an all-glorious Being, higher than his own, capable of a nature more divine than the one he possessed by birth, began to steal over Mr. Veriker. He felt himself tremble, and Christopher at that moment stretching his hand towards him, he could scarce take it in his own.

"I have been exciting you," Christopher said, quick to catch sight of the increased pallor on his face. "Don't read the letter now. Put it away: we'll talk about this another time."

Mr. Veriker made a movement of his head. Time with him he knew was fast running to its end. He wanted to speak now. He thought he would tell Christopher about Jack—how Robin and he had been left together—ask his advice; speak of why Jack had gone away, and how, since, he had cast him off from them altogether. He did not stop to ask, why the prompting to say this to Christopher? He only knew that he felt it was a sort of duty, a reparation he ought to make, and he would make it if he could get the strength to speak.

"The brandy," he gasped: "in that cupboard there. Before she comes in give me some!"

Christopher searched the shelf, but it was in a bottle which he did not at once see.

"Never mind; there's some ether, that will do. Hand it over! Quick! or she'll be back."

Christopher looked round for some water, got a glass, and finally put the bottle to his nose to make sure it was the right stuff. Mr. Veriker watched him

with all the impatience of his disease. He had to tighten his lips to keep back the irritable exclamations which he was bursting to fling at him. The effort at control only aggravated his distress.

"Oh, it's no good now!" he exclaimed, his quick ear catching the sound of Robin's voice. "I—I——" the sharp pain which came like a stab forced him into silence. He shut his eyes, and lay back exhausted.

"What is the matter?" Robin was sniffing the sickly odor now so familiar to her. "You've been giving him ether? Papa!"

Mr. Veriker tried to reassure her by making a movement of his hand, but the conflicting emotions of the last hour had overtaxed him. He was growing faint.

Tossing aside her hat, Robin flung herself down beside him. Her attitude was a study for despair. Poor child! all unversed in the ways of illness, she had not an idea of what remedies to apply. It was Christopher who brought what was necessary, and in a few minutes Mr. Veriker, who had never quite lost consciousness, was sufficiently restored to open his eyes.

"You have been talking to him too much," Robin murmured, looking round to Christopher reproachfully.

Mr. Veriker shook his head.

"There are some things we must talk of together," he said faintly.

"But nothing that I may not hear. I know what has made you come, Christopher." He was shaking so that he could hardly stand. She was looking at him steadfastly. "Papa has told me. You want me to marry you, he says, and I am quite willing. Only let it be very soon, so that we may get away from here quickly."

"But," Christopher managed to say, "that need not stop us. We can go away without it being necessary for you to marry me, Robin."

"No, no," she said impetuously. "I would rather we were married: he wishes it," she added, lowering her voice. "It will do him good. Didn't you say, papa," for she saw he was listening, "that you would

like me to marry Christopher—that it would make you happy?

"Yes, I said so," murmured Mr. Veriker. "I didn't think of him then," and he struggled with the emotion which now so easily overcame him; "but since he has come back——" It was of no use; the lump in his throat was choking him, and, breaking down, he sobbed out, "He's a good fellow, Robin; a good fellow. God bless him! God bless him!"

Robin stretched out her arms; Christopher caught her hand.

"We'll talk together later," he whispered. "Say no more now."

* * * * * *

But in the conversation which took place between them later on, nothing better was arrived at. Robin steadily maintained that she wished to marry him, and when Christopher ventured to ask if she loved him, she said she had not any love to give to anyone now—all her love was swallowed up by her father; and Christopher, overcome by the giant desire, grew accustomed to the whisper it made in his ear that in time, by the aid of his untiring devotion, love would most certainly come; gradually, by degrees, Robin would learn the lesson, and, sweetest of all enticements, he would be her teacher.

Without delay, he wrote at once to his father, and Mr. Blunt, pleased by what he considered his management of the matter, offered no opposition; indeed, Christopher, wise in his generation, so worded the announcement in his letter that his father was pleased by the decision, and thought none the less of Robin for the readiness she had displayed in closing at once with such a good offer.

Mr. Veriker, daily weaker, after that one effort, never returned to the subject again. The moment for speaking out—what was now locked up for ever in his breast—had passed by. Soothed by Christopher's presence and attentions, he began to feel he could not

do without him. To send him away was robbing himself of his only chance of life. When Christopher once hinted at the letter he had given him, Mr. Veriker said he would read it later. But the evening he had received it he had put it away, and he kept putting off the trouble of taking it out of his desk again.

So the necessary preliminaries, entrusted to Mr. Holton, an English notary, who resided at Venice, were ordered to be hastened on with all possible despatch, and to Christopher at least the time went by swiftly.

The necessity of constant attendance on her father formed a sufficient excuse for Robin and him to be but little alone, and seeing how soon her care would be in vain, Christopher forbore to lure her from the watch she kept. It was only Robin who did not, could not, would not see the rapid decline in Mr. Veriker. A mere hint that he did not seem so well brought down her displeasure on the speaker.

The going away from Venice immediately after the marriage was the event which buoyed her up. Traveling had always agreed with him. He had never been ill while they were going about from one place to another, and as soon as the wedding was over, they were all three, the very same day, to start off, and begin by easy stages their journey Spezzia, the place which Mr. Veriker had fixed on to go to; where he said he should like to stay, giving as a reason to Christopher that his wife lay buried there.

"Child, I don't fancy it would do me much good to go and see you married," Mr. Veriker said, the morning before the wedding-day. "Would you mind if we got Mr. Holton to act my part as father?"

Not a bit; she did not mind. The ceremony she had to go through was a mere ceremony to her.

In the first few days after Christopher's arrival, Robin's couch had been watered nightly by tears of anguish and despair; but now, familiar with his presence, relieved by his thoughtfulness, never obtruded on by his advances, all this was past—sunk in the

greater anguish which haunted her like a spectre, the unknown dread of something which, although she shut her eyes to it, she saw each hour stealing nearer.

Posted up as to the day when the marriage would take place, Mr. Blunt, still in high good humor, sent a substantial proof of his favor, together with a letter, from which Christopher improvised messages to Robin and her father.

The luggage was packed; all was ready. Madame Giacomuzzi was to look after Mr. Veriker, who had promised to rest quietly unlil the return of the bride and bridegroom *Dejuener* would then be served, and they would be in time for the train which was to take them on to Verona.

To cover the under-current of emotion which oppressed them all, great interest was feigned in Mr. Blunt's letter, scraps from which, while waiting for Mr. Holton, Christopher went on reading.

"It is our Squire," he said in explanation—"I left him very ill—who, my father says. is dying, and all the place is agog to know how he will leave his property."

"No heir, then ?"

"No children—a nephew whc has quarrelled with him. They have sent for him, though, it seems now. He is abroad somewhere."

"Lucky dog," sighed Mr. Veriker. "Why ain't I that nephew ?"

"Oh, I don't think you need wish to be: the people don't seem to say much that is good about him, I fancy."

"So far as I ever discovered, nobody ever said anything good of me," and Mr. Veriker smiled feebly. What's the name of this nephew ?"

"Name !" said Christopher, whose thoughts were following Robin. "Oh, Chandos—the Squire's name."

"Chandos ?" repeated Mr. Veriker. "Wasn't his name Chandos, Robin ?" and he turned his head round to find she was not there.

"Robin has gone downstairs," said Christopher. "I expect it's time for me to follow her."

Below, Robin was speaking to Madame Giacomuzzi. The woman held her by the hand. Her motherly heart yearned towards the girl.

"Ah, it is not you she would have chosen," she said, addressing Christopher a few minutes later, as she stood watching them go, for Mr. Holton had joined them and they were walking towards the gondola. "She needed but to say, 'I don't want Paolo,' and I knew about whom she was thinking;" and she hugged the baby she was nursing closer, and went to find a candle to set up before the picture of the "Madonna."

Meanwhile Giacomuzzi came back from the steps. He had been keeping in readiness the gondola. The old waiter, in company with the sister who helped in the house duties, returned from the vantage-spots they had chosen. The marriage had been quite an excitement among the household. Now they must call to mind their duties. Madame would go up and see after the Signor. Would she then give him this letter? and Giacomuzzi took one from his pocket and gave her. It had come an hour ago. In the bustle he had forgotten to deliver it; but she need not say so.

Madame Giacomuzzi—as she said after—took up the letter, gave it to Mr. Veriker, who asked her to give him some water. There was none in the room, and she went to fetch it, and when, perhaps ten minutes later—for something down-stairs detained her—she returned, she found Mr. Veriker lying back faint. But she had seen him faint often before, so she threw over his forehead some of the water and then thought she would burn under his nose some paper—alas! in her haste, the very letter; but he did not come to, so she called to Giacomuzzi, and he ran for the doctor, and the doctor came, and was still there when the wedding-party returned, and Robin, flushed and trembling, ran up, close followed by Christopher.

"Papa!" and then, seeing a crowd in the room, she made a rush forward. "Father! father!" but some

one intercepted her. "Father!" she screamed, and with all her might she struggled to get free.

"Hush! hush! he cannot hear you."

Mr. Veriker lay dead. Beside him was a screwed-up bit of burnt paper.

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE of Jack Dorian's chief sources of regret while away, was the fear that he had forfeited the friendship of the Temples. His uncle he knew had misrepresented him to them, and he felt sore that they had believed him.

Not of a disposition to excuse himself—for he was well aware there were many instances in his conduct which called for indulgence—Jack allowed a gradual coldness to increase in their letters, which by degrees came less frequently, until, as before shown, they at length had ceased altogether.

Georgy, staunch in her friendships, at the risk of losing Mr. Chandos's good opinion, never ceased to stand up for her former playfellow.

"I don't care what anyone may say of him, I shall always maintain he was badly treated," she would repeat to her mother, who, now that the chance of uniting these two seemed over, bewailed Jack's ingratitude as another proof of the ill-luck which ever dogged her.

Of a certainty—now that Jack had left him, and the house was shut up—the Squire would marry; and the flavor of the fruit and the vegetables, which came from the Manor during his absence, were spoilt by her constantly showing for how short a time they should enjoy them.

During the whole of those years since Jack had left, the Temples, and through them all Wadpole, were kept in a continual ferment of expectation. They were the standing dish always hailed with relish, these *on dits* about the Squire. He was going to marry—he was not going to marry; he was married—there was

nothing in it. Then as regarded Jack, fifty reports were circulated, to be received or rejected according to the disposition of the hearer: the uncle and nephew had cut off the entail, and because of the sum of money given in consideration to the latter, Mr. Chandos could not afford to live at Wadpole.

Jack Dorian—according to another account—had repelled with indignation this offer, and out of his refusal arose the displeasure of his uncle. Perhaps Mr. Chandos never heard one-half of these fabrications, assuredly the half he did hear did not annoy him; on the contrary, he rather liked to mystify his neighbors, and was shrewd enough to feel he lost nothing personally by those about him believing he had gained the power of leaving what he possessed at will.

He was staying at Brighton—raising the fondest hopes in the breast of a very fair young lady, who was almost quite what he desired—when this illness attacked him; at first not considered serious, but gradually increasing, so that when the rector, for whom he had sent, arrived, he was past talking business with him. But, only as was thought for a time, hope was far from extinguished as to his ultimate recovery; yet knowing how uncertain is life, his physicians recommended if there were any relatives he might desire to see that they should be warned of his danger and sent for immediately.

"I feel like a fish out of water here by myself," wrote the rector; "I should like Georgy to come to me." And Georgy went to him, and all Wadpole saw in her going the certainty that it was she who was to possess the property.

"Now how shall we hunt out Jack?" was Georgy's first inquiry; "no matter what has passed between them, to find him and bring him here seems to me our duty."

"Then I had best write to old Clarkson," said the rector, who would not oppose his daughter's proposition, although he would never have had the strength

himself to act thus generously. And Mr. Clarkson written to, he, with a better knowledge of how affairs stood between the uncle and nephew, telegraphed to where he had sent Jack, giving orders that the message should be forwarded on to wherever he might be; and it was by these means that Jack Dorian was brought to England, only giving himself time before he started on his journey to write to Mr. Veriker.

A happy woman was Mrs. Temple that day when she went to the station to meet her husband, Jack, and Georgy. Mr. Chandos was dead. They were bringing back his remains to bury. Jack Dorian was Jack Dorian no longer; he was Mr. Dorian-Chandos, the new Squire of Wadpole. Every one thought him altered, a few thought him improved, and among the few was Georgy. Little wonder that Mrs. Temple's hopes again ran high when she saw the attention Jack paid readily accepted by her daughter. The two seemed instinctively to fall into their old ways, and though, by reason of his uncle's death, and the business it entailed on him, there was no opportunity to resume their amusements, the time they spent together was generally occupied in recalling reminiscences of them.

"As soon as I am settled down here," Jack would say; and, as time went on—for it took some months to arrange the necessary business—say rather pointedly, Georgy began to fancy. What did he mean about this settling down? She did not know why, but the sentence always conveyed that the meaning to be understood was "when I marry." But marry whom? He had never spoken—never even hinted of any attachment he had formed. Could he, she wondered, be married already? Sometimes, by his manner, she thought it possible. He was absent, preoccupied, talked about alterations in the house, the gardens, the furniture, always as if he had someone in his eye whose taste he was consulting. Georgy was puzzled rather over this, and, as had been her habit

for more than a year now whenever anything perplexed her, she took into her confidence Mr. Cameron.

"You don't think it's you?" said the curate, simply.

"Me? No; what makes you ask that question?"

"Because it entered into my head, as it seems to have entered into the heads of a good many."

"Oh, really; has it? Well, and how do you like the notion?"

Mr. Cameron hesitated.

"Come, speak out—tell me."

"I don't know that I ought," he said. "I have no reason to give, but I don't like the notion at all."

Georgy smiled amusedly. "You are generally so full of reasons," she said.

"Yes; am I not? But I wouldn't say it for the world to anyone but you; we are always frank together"—she smiled back at him encouragingly. "From the first evening I met the Squire, I felt towards him a kind of antipathy."

"Yes; did you?"

"Do I pain you by saying so?"

"No, I don't know that you do; although, being very fond of him, I can't quite see the necessity."

"Nor can I either, and it is that that troubles me."

"You must try and get over it while he is away. He is going abroad again."

"Abroad? I thought it was but to London he had gone."

"So he has now, but after he comes back next week, he is going to Italy, I believe. He has talked of it to me for some time, only there was so much to do that he could not leave before."

"Not to *stay*—he is not going?"

"No, no; only about some business—business which seems to me a little mysterious, somehow."

"Oh—h, I understand," said Mr. Cameron, and his face beamed at the discovery he thought he had made. "When is he coming down?—to-morrow?—with the bride and bridegroom?—will he?"

'No, not until Thursday; and I'm not sorry, for he's taken an awful dislike to old Blunt, and might be a little stiff with your friend Christopher." And having reached the Green, where they were to part, the two bade each other good-bye; Mr. Cameron going his way, humming to himself softly—he felt so unaccountably light-hearted, he couldn't think why—Georgy smiling. "If ever I make up my mind to break my mother's heart" (Mrs. Temple had declared that if Georgy married as badly as Isabel had done, this calamity would most certainly occur), "I shall have to propose to him myself; it will never enter his head unless I put it there; of that I feel sure."

During the time Jack was being installed as the new Squire of Wadpole, he had written several letters, both to Mr. Veriker and to Robin, to which he had received no reply; within the last few weeks some of these had returned, and, without seeing any immediate reason for it, Jack began to feel a little uneasy. Could anything have happened to Mr. Veriker? or were they still roaming, hidden away in some out-of-the-way spot which he had forgotten, or did not know? In that last letter, written, as Jack imagined, when they were on the point of leaving Venice, Mr. Veriker had dwelt much on seeking quiet and warmth; that was, he said, what he wanted for the winter—but the winter was past now, the spring had come, and no doubt at one of their old haunts he should find them; and oh, their surprise at hearing the news he had to tell! Jack often fed his love by picturing the delight of Robin, and fed his pride by the astonishment he knew Mr. Veriker would feel. His *amour propre* had never quite recovered the thrust dealt by the father, who had shown him he did not hold him worthy of his daughter.

"But there, I forgive him," he would say, "for if it had not been for him I should never have written to Clarkson, and if I hadn't written to Clarkson they would not have known where to find me."

That he had seen his uncle again, confessed his

repentance, received his forgiveness, was an unknown comfort to Jack. Standing strong and full of health beside the bed of the pain-racked, dying man, Jack was filled with compunction for everything that had happened between them; while Mr. Chandos, with the clearer-sightedness of approaching death, felt that he had wronged his nephew. Neither of them were men given to protestations. Only a word or two passed between them on the subject, but that word was sufficient. "Oh for the time to come over again!" In each heart that wish found echo, a wish so mercifully for our failures never granted.

When later on Jack said to Mr. Clarkson, that but for the last week he had spent with his uncle his inheritance would have been robbed of its value to him, he but spoke the truth, and his old friend believed him; and the knowledge of the peace of mind he had gained through it made him, whenever he thought of that week, grow very compassionate towards Mr. Veriker. He would act very liberally towards him, although of course it would not be quite possible to have him too much there. It might interfere with his training of Robin, for already Jack was indulging in many ambitious ideas, and although he would not have confessed it to himself—for oddly enough most of us have two natures, the loftiness of one despising the weaknesses of the other—he felt at times a sense of complacency that he should remain so constant to the memory of that little neglected child, that run-wild girl, when so many advantageous marriages were certain now to present themselves to him.

Already he had received congratulations and calls from everyone worth knowing in the county, his tenants and neighbors had welcomed him, and with the exception of that vulgar brute old Blunt—between himself and whom there had been a dispute concerning some adjoining land which he proved he had the right to occupy—he was on good terms with everybody.

The one cause of regret, the new Squire had been

heard to say, was that his land should dovetail into that odious parvenu's property; and he reproached the Wadpole people for permitting a respectable estate, like Priors, to get into the hands of money-grubbing tradesmen.

"It deteriorates the place in the eyes of the whole county," he said, "to have people of that sort set down in the very midst of us. Once there, and how are you to get them away?—you can't do it, the thing's impossible; before the father dies the son marries; naturally he has a family, and there you are."

Considering the feeling he had towards Mr. Blunt, Mr. Dorian-Chandos was very glad that he would not be at Wadpole when this expected son and his new wife should arrive: his immediate starting for Italy would relieve him of the necessity to call until he returned. Well, a good many things would have happened before then, on which would depend whether he included these people among those who had the *entree* at the Manor.

CHAPTER XX.

APPETITE—says the proverb—comes with eating, and a little excitement induces the desire for more. Thus the inhabitants of Wadpole, having had their tastes whetted by the death of the Squire, the return of his nephew—whom, notwithstanding the rupture between them, he had left his heir—were ready to seize on the smallest opportunity which afforded scope for gossip and speculation. This was just now provided by the expected return of the bride and bridegroom—Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Blunt were coming home. Priors was being made ready to receive them; old Mr. Blunt had settled down there again, and was awaiting their arrival.

It was the middle of April; four months had gone since the death of Mr. Veriker, time spent by Robin and Christopher in visiting the different places where

in former days she had lived with her father. Shocked by the tragic coming to pass of an event which he had so often openly wished might occur, Mr. Blunt readily acceded to any plan which prevented his being brought face to face with Robin's grief.

"I'd rather she got quit of it a little before you come home here," he said in writing to Christopher; "so don't mind the expense, go about as much as you like, and let her see plenty to amuse her."

Christopher had taken him at his word, and during the time which followed, life had been Paradise to him.

How wonderful is love! with what patience it endures! Christopher never seemed to tire of listening to those rhapsodies which Robin, in her early days of sorrow, kept repeating about her father; nay, rather because they seemed to lift her burden he would encourage her, and in so doing gained her trust and confidence as his reward.

She leaned on him for support, spoke openly to him of her hopes and fears, and by degrees began to lend a more willing ear to the little things he said to ease her sorrow. That her father was at rest, free from suffering and pain. "Yes, but God could have made him well here." And then the hope that they would meet again, that they were not separated for ever. "But I wanted to go with him then."

Alas, poor Robin! Christopher had need to love her. The poor bruised heart was well worth healing, and the husband was made in no way jealous because of the devotion the child bore to her father. Besides, Robin's sorrow was not morbid, she did not wear it on her sleeve to sadden everyone around her.

After the first few weeks—when, struck down and helpless, time passed she knew not how—brought back to life through the care of Christopher, she strove for control, and would pass whole days seemingly pleased and even cheerful. Only from one eye she could not hide the unbidden tears which some passing sight or

careless word would make flow, and then Christopher taking her hand would by a gentle pressure tell her she had his sympathy. Thus they became fast friends, constant companions, one of them entirely dependent on the other. To be watched, have her wishes forestalled, to be waited on, was something new to Robin; to be trusted in, leaned on, looked up to, equally new and far more delicious to Christopher.

Those former doubts whether he should gain her love did not oppress him now; daily he felt more secure in the happy certainty and Robin, without knowing it, was steadily drifting to the same conclusion.

Love, in the sense in which she had once known it, no longer existed for her. Her father's death and her consequent sorrow seemed to have killed outright every emotion which did not bear on grief for him. It did not even strike her as strange that she should feel utterly cold and indifferent about Jack, having no interest concerning him, except perhaps how and when he would hear of the sad event, and a grim satisfaction that he would be startled to be told the circumstances which had made it so tragic.

When Christopher had asked whether she would not like any friend written to, Robin had said resolutely, "No." What mattered it now who came or stayed away? it was all the same to her. The icy hand whose hold was laid on him she loved would not loosen its grip.

In spite of all that she had done, he was gone. He was dead. She was left alone. Let the living go their way—no one could ease her grief, no one could make her happy. Her father no longer with her, in those days Robin believed that happiness had fled from her for ever.

Now that Time, with "healing in his wings," had begun to soften her sorrow, bitterness had also given way, and, bridging over more present memories, her thoughts would sometimes wander off to earlier days. What had become of her teacher, master, childish adviser? Would they ever meet again? A sigh would

answer "Never," and slowly down her face the unchecked tears would roll. And Christopher, finding her, would take her hand. Why was she crying? Robin could not answer him; hardly could she have made answer to herself, except that she was thinking of bygone days—of things that had happened long ago.

"We shall soon be home now," Christopher would say, hoping that fresh scenes, new faces, and new duties would prove for Robin the best distraction.

Already many plans had been mapped out of things they would do together, and Robin, by Christopher's description, had grown quite familiar with Wadpole and its people.

They, in their turn, were far more curious regarding the new arrival than Christopher dreamt of, or Mr. Blunt gave them credit for; and it would have surprised the two not a little could they have heard some of the conversations which about this time—whenever any gathering brought people together—went on in Wadpole concerning them.

"I wonder what she will turn out like—this Mrs. Christopher Blunt," each one began to say. Most of those who knew Christopher were well disposed towards him; the drawback was "that terribly vulgar father."

"But the son cannot help what is amiss with the father. Why should you punish one man for the failings of another?"

This was Mr. Cameron speaking—Mr. Cameron, the curate of Wadpole—and, because he was very fair, small, and boyish-looking, his flock, mostly stout, able-bodied, well-to-do people, were rather given to laugh at him. They ridiculed his zeal, affected to be a little shocked by his principles, and rather resented the plain-spoken way in which he took them to task in his sermons. The vicar, Mr. Temple, though seeming to sympathize with this prejudice, secretly chuckled over the occasion of it, while Miss Georgy, his daughter,

was oenly the champion of Mr. Cameron, and wherever she was present he had a defender. Overflowing with animal spirits, health, vigor, a feature of her disposition was to take the part of every weaker creature; and Mr. Cameron, town-bred, worked beyond his strength, forced to come to the country—his chance of life to breathe a purer atmosphere—seemed to have a claim to protection from her.

At first a little amused at his ignorance of sport, his nervousness about guns, and his timidity whenever he found himself on a horse—the awkward fashion in which he sat one sent her into fits of laughing—Georgy was quick to recognize the higher qualities of a man whose courage knew no limit when bidden by duty to obey his call; and whom she saw go willingly and fearlessly to watch by bedsides of which most others shunned the danger. Added to this, Mr. Cameron was eminently conspicuous for the courage of his opinions, and, bashful as he might be in society, never failed to speak did necessity require it of him. Whatever his daughter cared for, Mr. Temple viewed with favor; therefore, though not so openly, in the rector the curate had another staunch partisan.

Mr. Temple was rector of two parishes—Wadpole, and, some three miles distant, Uplands. Before Mr. Cameron's time, Uplands represented £100 a year, the curate's salary, in return for which every second Sunday a service was supposed to be held in the schoolroom there. But the people of Uplands were not great church-goers. A scattered parish on the outlying edge of a long stretch of common, the place was not viewed with favor: idlers, reputed poachers, bird-snarers, rat-catchers, all congregated there; the cottages were ill-smelling, their inhabitants evil-living. The Pharisees of Wadpole wondered that such a disgrace was permitted to exist so near.

A little down-hearted at sight of Wadpole—everybody seemed so moral and prosperous there—Mr. Cameron's heart leaped with joy at the account of

Uplands; after all there would be a field to labor in, and he might turn to profitable account the time he was forced to stay here; and going to reconnoitre, he fell in by the way with Christopher Blunt, they walked on together, and found that each enjoyed the other's company.

Mr. Blunt, on being told of their meeting, with a view to step into the magic circle, proposed to strengthen the acquaintance by inviting the curate to a dinner-party, an invitation which the curate was prompt to decline.

"I shall be very glad to call and see you," he said, frankly, "and if then, at any time, when I could stay, you like to ask me to dinner, I should really feel obliged to you; but I'm not a diner-out, it's a waste of time, and a lot of dishes don't agree with me."

Mr. Blunt was disposed to be offended at this—Christopher, on the other hand, was pleased; the refusal was in keeping with the man, and consistent with much he had said. Frightfully sensitive about everything that savored of ostentation, it was not until a second chance meeting had brought up the subject of Uplands that Christopher ventured to say he hoped he might assist in money, if he could not in any other way. Mr. Cameron readily accepted the offer; and just at the time of the arrival of Mr. Veriker's letter, these two men were slowly creeping on towards a steady friendship with one another.

Mr. Cameron had asked Christopher to come any evening and see him at his lodgings; Christopher had readily accepted the invitation to go. Mr. Blunt—disposed to think meanly of a man who refused a good dinner when he got the chance of getting one, and utterly opposed to his son being mixed up with anything that brought him in contact with a set of idle vagabonds who got their living God knows how—looked askant on the intimacy, and even went so far as to say as much to the rector.

"The vulgar old upstart!" ejaculated Mr. Temple

mentally; but outwardly he only laughed, as was his way when anything which might have called forth a rebuke was said to him.

Taken to task sometimes by his straightforward daughter, he would tell her with a touch of irony that he had found it easier to become a parson than to become a hypocrite; and if not satisfied, as she never was with this reply, she continued the argument, it was only to draw a lot of banter from her father, ending with his oft-quoted aphorism: It would be all the same a hundred years hence.

But would it be the same? Georgy Temple doubted. She was clear-sighted enough to see there were many duties left unfulfilled by the rector, and the sight of these troubled her. Sighing over them, she invariably felt a yearning pity for her father; and Mr. Temple was indeed much to be pitied, for he was a man with a spoilt life and a warped character. Nature had intended him for anything rather than a clergyman, which fate had destined him for. His godfather held in his gift the living of Wadpole, and when he had recommended that his godson should be brought up to the Church, the parents had regarded the boy as the most fortunate among their children; great sacrifices were made to send him to Eton and to Oxford, and this done, there was no use in protesting when he was involved in difficulties out of which there was but one way of escape: he must be ordained, accept the living and marry his patron's daughter.

Had ever anyone heard of such a fortunate young man? The congratulations of all around him made the draught none the sweeter; but George Temple swallowed it, and few ever suspected how much it cost him. It took him years to get rid of the bitterness, discontent, humiliation with which his duties filled him; a fine nature with such a battle to fight would have overcome or would have died.

Mr. Temple did neither—he did not possess a fine nature, therefore he became gradually lowered by the

contest, and now, when he was a man on the wrong side of fifty, with a family grown up around him, he was chiefly distinguished by the eccentricities which arose from doing as he pleased, and letting things manage themselves as best they could without him. He did not commend the righteous, neither did he rebuke the sinner; this latter omission looked on as a great dereliction of duty, and, in his neighbor's eyes, one of the worst traits in his character—that screening of the poacher, the drunkard, the Sabbath-breaker, it was worse than wrong; it was encouraging them in their evil ways. Even Mr. Cameron had ventured to say something of this to him, and the rector bade the young man take them to task.

"You're the right fellow to do it," he said, but as for himself, he held his tongue.

Partly on account of her having been the daughter of a former Squire, and because she put forth a claim to sympathy from all who knew her, Mrs. Temple was viewed with great forbearance by her neighbors in Wadpole.

She was a woman in a chronic state of grievance; misfortune, according to her own showing, had never ceased to pursue her.

She had started in life by being of the wrong sex, and so had forfeited the inheritance to which she nevertheless continued to consider herself rightfully entitled.

For years after her marriage she had lived in constant hope of having a son; only daughters were born to her. Her husband, more particularly viewed by the light she applied to him, had turned out a perfect failure; he did nothing to maintain their position in the county, pointedly avoided all contact with the Bishop, and, devoid of ambition, declared that being rector of Wadpole, he intended to live and die there. Mrs. Temple had long ago ceased to recollect that the choice of her husband had been entirely her own, and that against the advice and wishes of her father she had insisted on marrying a very lukewarm lover.

Carrying on the chain of disaster, her eldest daughter, Isabel—now Mrs. Spencer—had married, oh, so badly! a poor man in a marching regiment with nothing but a soldier's pay to keep them on, and babies forever coming. Of course it was out of the question that they should have any thing to give her; it was as much, indeed more than they could do to keep themselves, for, as Mrs. Temple frankly confessed—and here undoubtedly she spoke the truth—she was no manager, she had not been brought up as one, had never been taught to look at each penny before it was spent, and therefore could not do so now.

So with an income which, under ordinarily good management, might have served for a very sufficient living, the house was always in confusion and disorder: children—the young Spencers—who, coming first under pretext of a visit, prolonged their stay until they were left altogether there, running all over the house; dogs in every room; pets of all descriptions everywhere. The family came and went as they liked, each individual doing what he or she pleased,

There was a schoolroom virtually allotted to the Spencers and the youngest daughter, Dora, between whom and Georgy a gap of some years came.

In her growing-up, Georgy Temple had had for a companion the late Squire's nephew, Jack Dorian; the two, in short, had emulated each other, both pupils of the rector, at whose heels they constantly ran. As a boy, Jack invariably spent his holidays with the Temples; and it gradually unfolded itself to Mrs. Temple that the glory and honor of the family would be greatly restored if these two ever became one. The wish added to the interest she felt in Jack's favor—she cared for the boy on his own account, and in the general ways of life was by no means a schemer; but should the rector die, how little there would be to maintain them! And Georgy married to Jack, what more natural than to shift the burden of the younger children on to the shoulders of their sister—the Manor

House was large enough to take them; the means, compared to what she had now, were ample.

So far then it was decided: there remained but one obstacle—the Squire might marry; against that he must be guarded. So as long as Mr. Chandos lived Mrs. Temple continued to be, on that subject, his nettle. By reminding him of his age, the dangers at his time of life of changing his condition, she strengthened his resolves, and they seldom separated from a *tete-a-tete* without his declaring to himself that could he but meet the exact person he wanted, if it was only to spite that woman, he would marry to-morrow.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEN Christopher and Robin arrived at Wadpole Station, they found the carriage awaiting them, but not Mr. Blunt; he was deterred from coming, his man said, by a threatening of gout, from a bad attack of which he had but recently recovered Unable during his son's absence to endure the tedium of home, Mr. Blunt had spent most of his time in London in the company of those few choice companions who, for the sake of what they got by knowing him, listened to his bragging, and didn't mind his bluster.

Kept temperate and sober during his working life by a will which was strong enough to overcome desire, Mr. Blunt considered that he had earned the right to self-indulgence; and he acted accordingly, the habit of excess growing on him as he grew older.

In presence of his son, and within eye-reach of his neighbors whose lives were given up to the god Respectability, Mr. Blunt felt compelled to put a restraint on his actions, eat of the dishes set before him, drink wine only in the measure that was good for him. Suddenly this strain would prove too great; he would one morning invent some business which necessitated a few days' absence, and at the end of a week perhaps he would return and take up again the daily life of dull routine.

But Christopher absent—the house partly shut up—there was no necessity for coming back, and from a little before Christmas to the present week in April, Mr. Blunt had been away leading a life, according to the people he spent it among, by which every day he drove into his coffin a fresh nail. His continued debauch, for it had degenerated into little else, had at length pulled him up short by a very sharp attack of gout, from which he was only just recovered when he arrived at Wadpole.

With an impatience under pain, which he felt a man so prosperous ought not to be called upon to bear, and a nervous dread of death whenever he was ill, Mr. Blunt had a superstitious aversion to mourning, which Christopher conveying to Robin as delicately as he could, she had so far given in to his scruples as to lay aside all crape, and consent to appear in black or in white as occasion might call for.

"That is the Manor—Mr. Chandos's place, Robin—there, where that clump of trees is—high up—do you see?"

Christopher was not sorry to have Robin to himself for the drive from the station; he wanted to be the first to point out the features of her new home—*their* home as it was now to be.

"What, on what looks like a hill, do you mean?"

"Yes; behind there, hidden from us, is the house; the ground slopes down from that into what is almost a wood, the right to which he has taken from my father, I hear."

"Oh, but that isn't very nice, is it? He's a new squire too, isn't he, since you went away?"

Christopher had beguiled many an hour by picturing the place to which he was going to take her, and now that Robin had reached there she felt proud to air her knowledge, and to show him that his pains had not been thrown away.

The spread of her young affections lay all dressed, and like the fields by which they were passing, ready

to receive the good seed of each new domestic tie. The house which they were nearing was to be her home, the old man awaiting them another father, the neighbors who would call she would make friends of.

"Oh! see, Christopher, how nice they look!"

The lodge-gates were thrown open; clustered around them were the keeper's rosy children. Robin returned their salutations by touching her lips with the tips of her fingers; and the woman, looking after her with open-eyed admiration, for there was something very childlike and foreign in the movement she had made, said, "Pretty young creature! I wonder what th' ole brute up there'll say to her."

A similar doubt was filling Christopher's mind, causing his heart to flutter with sickening anxiety; he so hoped his father would speak kindly, say what he ought to her; and at the bare supposition of her being wounded creeping in, he was amazed at the rush of indignation which followed.

Looking up, his eyes met hers, and the sight of her fair young face vanquished his fears. Who could look at her and not love her? and Robin now was looking very fair—time had restored her strength, care and good living had brought back a healthy color to her cheeks, and Christopher's generosity enabled her to indulge her taste so that her dress was in every way becoming.

Already she had carried by storm the admiration of the servants: most of whom had assembled in the hall and there stood watching her, as she hurried up the stairs after Christopher, to be taken by him into the presence of his father. Mr. Blunt had not thought it necessary to leave the room in which he sat, to come downstairs A tribute to Robin was paid by the butler, who felt the omission, and tendered his master's gout as an apology.

"So here you are back again at last! Well! oh! this is Robin, is it, the wife you've brought back with you?"

It was not surliness, but a want of breeding which embarrassed Mr. Blunt at this moment, and prevented him speaking more graciously. He had all the desire then to welcome Robin, and when she, stretching out her hands, offered to kiss him on both cheeks, saying, "Uncle, thank you for all your kindness; I hope you'll like me," he kissed her heartily.

"I'm sure I shall," he said, "my dear, if you're only half as good as you're good-looking; I shall be very fond of you, you'll see, and make Christopher, there, jealous, I shouldn't wonder; why he's already twice the fellow he used to be—never saw anybody pick up so in my life; and what d'ye think o' me, eh?"

Robin got a little red.

"You are not at all like Christopher," she said hesitatingly.

The answer did not displease Mr. Blunt. Of a robust stature, with florid face, dark sharp eyes, hair which though grizzled was thick, and whiskers not altogether gray, he was very well satisfied with his appearance, considered he carried his age well, and thoroughly believed those who told him he didn't look a day older now than he did twenty years ago.

"Well, no; I s'pose not; can't give everything to your children, can ye?"

"Oh! but I like Christopher as he is; I don't want him altered."

"That's as it should be; take things as you find 'em—a very good motto. Only let him go on putting flesh upon his bones as he's done the last few months, and we'll put up with the rest, and the children can take after their mother, eh?"

What did he mean? Something funny, though what, Robin did not understand—for he chuckled and laughed and winked his eye to Christopher, who either failed like her to see the joke, or declined altogether to accept it.

"Which of the rooms has been made ready for us,

father?" he asked; and the tone of the question displeased the old man.

"Oh, the one at the end of the passage! I've given you the pick," he said a little huffily. "It's the best room in the house"—he seemed to address Robin—"barring mine. I don't turn out, you know, for anybody."

"Of course not."

Robin was hasty to accept what she presumed was intended as an apology.

"We should be very sorry for you to think of that on our account."

"Well, you see, I'm master here"—Mr. Blunt felt there was nothing like hitting the nail on the head at the right time—"I've always been, and I always mean to be."

"But, certainly. Christopher prepared me to consider you that."

"All right then," he said, intercepting his son's reply. "So long as this is understood I shall be very pleased to look on you as missis."

"And I shall be very pleased to act as such, as long as you wish me to."

"That'll be so long as you behave yourself, then," and the old man laughed good-humoredly. "Promise to keep it up, and I won't bring no mother-in-law to worry you."

Christopher was standing by the door waiting. Robin got up and followed him. His heart felt heavy. Certainly his father had never before seemed to him so vulgar. What must she think of him? How did he strike her? Oppressed by his doubts, he put his arms round her—a rare event, for Christopher was very chary of thrusting forward his affection. He had a very just calculation of how they stood one in regard to the other, and even feared lest he might frighten away the new-fledged love he thought he saw hovering near.

"Robin"—the words of sweet caress which lovers

use had been chilled in Christopher's speech, and he could not use them now—"I hope you will be happy here, now you have come."

"But I must be happy. This is our home. We cannot go away."

Ah, there lay the sting! Christopher had never asked, never wanted anything beyond having his wants supplied, and the money—always more than he had needed—that his father gave him. His continual weak health had prevented him from even desiring an occupation, for which, from Mr. Blunt's affluent means, he was well aware there was no occasion. But marriage seemed to have effected a revolution in his position. It was no longer fitting that a man with a wife should be dependent—himself and her—for every penny. He had not felt the gall while away; already it was beginning to chafe him sorely.

"Oh, but it will be all right!"

She saw he looked troubled.

"I shall soon get accustomed to everything; do not fear for me."

"My father is a little—— Well, old people are sometimes——"

Poor Christopher; he did not know what to say.

"Yes, I know; but don't let that worry you. I shall get used to him. I did not expect to find him what you are. There can't, you know, be two such Christophers to spoil me," and she lifted up her face for him to kiss her.

"Am I right?" he said; "is it true what I sometimes think, that you are getting by degrees to care a little for me?"

"A little!" she had begun to speak in jest.

Suddenly her face turned very grave, and fixing on him her eyes, she said:

"I know it is not yet what you want, but all the love I have left in my heart I have given to you."

And Robin spoke the truth. At that moment she had forgotten Jack, and was only thinking of her father.

CHAPTER XXII.

NEARLY a week had gone by since Robin's arrival at Wadpole, during which time, unacknowledged by himself, Mr. Blunt continued to play company

Always proud to exhibit his possessions, he felt a twofold satisfaction in displaying them to the daughter of his ancient enemy, who on her part, entirely disarmed all ill-feeling by her outspoken admiration of everything she saw.

Delighted to have some one to talk to who seemed always pleased to listen to him, Mr. Blunt did not spare Robin his society. Together, the morning was passed in going round the garden, through the greenhouses, over the stables. She had to listen to the individual cost of everything, and the expense entailed by keeping such an establishment in proper order.

For the afternoon there was an invitation to a solemn drive. That over, the evening was taken up by a lengthened out dinner, after which Mr. Blunt, rendered more than usually gallant by reason of the wine he had taken, volunteered to teach Robin cribbage.

It was the only game of cards he cared for, he said, and as soon as she had learnt it, they would be able to play every evening

Until after the bride had been seen at church, and Sunday had not yet come round, it was not probable that any one would call upon her, and Mr. Blunt decided that to go out walking beyond the grounds would not be considered etiquette, besides which, it would be running the risk of chance introductions which might be made a pretext for not coming to the house.

Since the marriage many who before had passed him by, with but a stiff recognition, had stopped to inquire about Christopher; they had expressed an interest in his happiness, and sympathy with the young wife whose father had died on her wedding-day.

Mr. Blunt had been ready with his own version of the tragedy, toned down by him to a respectable occurrence which might happen in any well-connected family. He did not want inquiries made about Mr. Veriker, and he purposely kept back the notice of his death, which Christopher had suggested he should send to the *Times* newspaper.

Even a ramble in the grounds was not viewed by Mr. Blunt with favor.

"I think I'd keep myself pretty much to the house," he said, "at least 'till after Sunday;" and when Robin pleaded the want of air, he proposed another round of the gardens together.

Wearied beyond anything she had ever dreamed of in her life; with no one to speak to but Christopher, never a voluble companion, and this terrible old man calling on her for admiration from morning until night —alas, poor Robin!

To whom could she turn? Not to Christopher—a sense of delicacy forbade her speaking to him about his father; besides, Christopher was so supremely happy. He loved Wadpole; the quiet country life was suited to his tastes, and now that Robin was there he had nothing left to desire. The utter absence of all refinement in Mr. Blunt, his vulgarity in speech and manner, although at times more distressing to his son than to any other creature, Christopher had become accustomed to, and therefore he suffered from no shock such as that felt by Robin. True it was that, filled with anxiety to know what she would think of his father, the first day or so had been trying; but since then, seeing the old man more attentive than he had ever before known him, and Robin listening, smiling, and good-humored, the good fellow had rejoiced, thinking how well they were getting on. He had said so to Robin, reminding her that he always told her she would find out the way to manage his father.

"I dare say it will be different when I come to know

the people round," the poor child thought, trying to administer some comfort to herself; "that Miss Temple we met riding, I feel as if I should like her."

"Christopher," she asked aloud, "what is the name of the Miss Temple we passed yesterday, when we were out driving?"

"Miss Georgy Temple," said Christopher absently. His thoughts were fixed on a proposition he had made that his father should allow him a certain sum a year.

"Do you think she is likely to call upon us soon?"

"Very soon, I should say: the rector has always seemed disposed to be friendly, and through Cameron I got rather to know Miss Georgy."

"Uncle"—she would not call him father; he did not like her saying Mr. Blunt—"says all the people will come next week; do you think so?"

"Most likely; and for that reason I am proposing to run up to London to-morrow with father."

"Oh, do!" The words were out before Robin knew she had said them; the thought of a day alone seemed to lift a ton weight from off her.

"It is only a matter of business that I should like to see in train to be settled, that makes me wish to go. I was hesitating, from the fear that you might be dull perhaps."

Christopher spoke—so Robin thought—as if he was a little hurt by her.

"No; I am sure to find something to do, and it is much better you should go now, than be away next week, you know."

"That is what father said—but I don't know—perhaps it is best, though; when next week came I should be just as unwilling to go as now. I shall never want to leave your side, Robin—if you want to get rid of me you'll have to send me away."

She made a faint smile do duty for words. Why could she not feel like that? she wanted to; instead of which her heart seemed like a feather at the bare

possibility of being left for a day free—a whole day without Christopher or his father.

That evening, later, the plan being arranged and the time of their departure settled on, Mr. Blunt, when giving orders, said: "About you, Robin—what'll you do to-morrow? I suppose you'll want something to take you out?"

"No, I shan't; don't order any carriage for me."

She was only too thankful of the reprieve.

"I shall stay at home; I have heaps of things to amuse me here, while you are gone."

Mr. Blunt looked his satisfaction; he felt sure this act of self-denial was made in obedience to his wishes.

"You'll come to the station with us?" Christopher said.

Robin shook her head.

"No, no," said Mr. Blunt decisively; "she's much better at home, as she says, and I shan't forget her, you'll see," and he looked smilingly at Robin. "I'll bring you back something from London that'll pay you for us being away."

So on the morning—a heaven-born day, all nature awake and rejoicing—in the morning, to catch the 11 o'clock train, the father and son set off to drive to the station. From the terrace which fronted the house Robin watched them down the avenue, at the end of which Christopher turned and waved good-bye to her, then out through the lodge-gates they went and were lost to sight.

Half-way along the road leading to the town, they overtook Miss Georgy Temple riding, walking her horse so as to keep pace with the new Squire, who, as they had been told, had returned to Wadpole a couple of days before.

Turning to see what it was coming behind them, the two separated so that the carriage might pass between, and as it did so, Miss Georgy bade them a friendly "Good-morning;" adding, "glad to see you back, Mr. Christopher."

The two Blunts raised their hats; the Squire, who had fallen back a pace, affected not to be looking at them.

"I say, Jack, you'll have to know those people." They had again joined company. "You need not make old Blunt a bosom friend, but you can afford to be civil to them in a way."

"I don't see for what reason."

"Well, one reason is the son; he's a very good fellow."

"He's got a beast for a father."

"Never mind; as a make-weight he's got a beauty for a wife—she is indeed; I caught a look at her passing on Thursday, and she's sweetly pretty. Oh, yes, you may grin, my dear fellow, but wait until you see her."

"That won't be just now then; I'm off on Saturday."

"Not really."

"Yes, really: I only came down to say good-bye to you."

"Shall you be gone long!"

Miss Georgy turned her eyes on the Squire fixedly.

"That depends," he said, looking straight at her, answering her gaze.

"H'm! I'm not generally a bit curious, Jack, but I should like to know what is taking you abroad."

"Should you?" He was smiling meaningly. "Well, I dare say, some day you will see the object I have for going."

"I believe I know; I'm almost certain that I have guessed right."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, shall I tell you what I think?"

"You may,"

"Will you tell me if it's true?"

"I don't promise that."

"Isn't the Manor going to have a mistress at last?"

"When the master marries I suppose it will."

"And isn't the master going away to get married, eh?"

"Let me see, this is the way I am going back. Good-bye, Georgy. Your mother has asked me to dine with you: *à ce soir*. Farewell."

But she would not let go the hand he had given her.

"Haven't I guessed right?" she said. "Tell me."

"Tell you what? I'll tell you this, if you don't take care you'll get hanged for a witch."

"Didn't I say so?" she said triumphantly, but Jack had jumped over the stile, and Georgy, touching up her horse, rode away saying to herself, "So that's what is taking you back, is it? I heard you telling papa it was some business you had left unfinished when you came away." And Jack, looking back after he had gone some distance, paused for a moment, divided between regret that he had said so much and the wish to say more.

Somehow, he was so full of Robin that day; whichever way his thoughts strayed they always led to her. The soft air, the bright sun, the cloudless sky, had each its influence. He had walked to where a dip in the road led two ways; there were a few trifling matters to be settled with his agent, and he turned his face towards Wadpole, took a few steps in that direction, and then whirled round.

"I should like to look at the old wood again," he said; I haven't been there since I came back. It was such a haunt of mine when I was a boy," and he hummed to himself a favorite tune as he went; and thinking still of Robin, her spirit seemed to bear him company on the way.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN company with Mr. Blunt, Robin had been taken all over the garden, and what he was pleased to call the "pleasure-grounds," but beyond that he did not care to go. There was nothing to see down there, he

said, referring to the thicket, below which stood a dark spot between the two sloping stretches of green. The place had been let go wild, run over with blackberry-bushes and brambles, that tore the very clothes off your back if you tried to get through them; besides, that was the place the Squire chose to say belonged to him —"So let him have it," he added. "Don't you go near it, Robin."

And Robin had said "No;" but now, on this morning, when spring seemed born, and all that had lain dormant and still through the long winter had leaped into life again, Robin's desire led her to seek where Nature reigned supreme. The birds were there, singing in those trees 'mid which their nests were built, and quick as the thought came pictured the delight of stealthily creeping up and peeping in to see the little feathered fledglings as they lay.

There below, under the shelter of those stretched-out boughs—mostly hawthorns and giant shrubs, grown thick and tall because no hand had curbed their lavish spread—what wealth of flowers sprang up before her eyes: primroses, bluebells, woodsorrel, violets! Already, with steps whose fleet impatience—while within range of watching eyes—she vainly strove to curb, Robin was flying across the lawn, and as she went she sang—for the chill of sorrow's hand seemed, for the first time to thoroughly let go its hold—and her heart, released, rejoiced with all around, and joined in the glad pæan which welcomed back life again. Oh, unison of Youth and Spring! Winter is past, sorrow is forgotten; summer is near, happiness is at hand.

Down through the grass, but partly dried of dew—which here and there sparkled like heaps of jewels caught by a beam of light—Robin ran, marking her path by this tree or by that, against which she clung, and panting paused for breath; then knitting herself close, quick as a fawn she made a leap across the half-choked brook, and laughed aloud to find herself safe on the other side. And now the thicket must be got

into, the barriers forced that guard its outer edge: brambles, whose long trails have caught the wandering shrubs and bowed their aspiring heads to nail them to the ground; furze, dried and withered under the weight of some strong sloe that, pushing it aside, has broken down the line, to stand thrust out to view. Here is a little gap by which, with many a wriggle, one might get one's body through. Beyond, while stooping to make search for entry of some kind, Robin has had peeps of moss-grown mounds and heaps of autumn leaves, from out of whose brown crispness pale primrose heads are peeping, and, like the child she is, her tongue goes babbling to them.

"You think I cannot get at you," she says; "but I am coming. You will see me soon."

Her head has poked itself well through, her hat she has flung across the furze, and, but that a bramble catches her by the skirt, she would have been inside ere now.

"You naughty, wicked thorns to try and keep me back." Her nimble fingers—quick to set her free—fling the trails aside with all her force of strength, and scrambling up, she goes on her way to where an ancient holly stands, embraced from the neighboring bank by suckers of the roses there. "Now, you must go aside!" Robin, impatient, brooked no more delay. With both her hands she freed the opening wide, and then—there was a pause—a cry, and she was caught within the arms of Jack, whose heart, set beating by sounds of what he knew not, had drawn him close, and brought them face to face. O Time! hold back thy sands; O Love! spread quick thy wings.

"Jack!"

"Robin"

Still holding hands, the two had drawn apart, and there stood gazing bewildered, each putting questions without waiting a reply.

The look which Jack cast upon the gown she wore seemed to give Robin the key.

"We've lost him, Jack," she cried; "he's gone—he's dead.

"Dead!"

"Ah, I knew how sorry you would be."

Jack had turned deathly pale.

"Sometimes I wondered, when you knew, whether you'd try and find me out."

He could not speak; a horrible tremor had seized him within.

"I didn't write because——" she stopped, the tears, blinding her eyes, fell down like rain. "What was the use? If you had come, what could you do? No one could bring him back to me—and there was Christopher to manage all the rest."

"My God!"

To get her handkerchief Robin had let go Jack's hand, and down it fell, nerveless, at his side.

"My God!" he repeated.

He saw it all; a flash had brought the thing, as it was, before him, with all its chain of evidence complete. The uncle written to, who turned all he touched to money, was this Blunt; the son who had married the young girl, Christopher; the father who died on the wedding-day was Veriker; and she who but a minute since seemed locked up in his heart's safe keeping, waiting for him there, he now stood looking at, another's wife. He staggered back as if a blow had struck him.

Robin stretched out her hands, but before they touched him he had pushed them aside, and down over his face the gathering cloud settled, his mouth tightened, his brow lowered.

'Are you married?" he said, harshly.

Robin's face flushed, for in the tone a reproach seemed flung.

"Yes," she said. "I am married to Christopher Blunt."

Jack's nostrils quivered. Was it contempt that made him look at her like that?

"What else was there for me to do?" she added. "They told me that ease, comforts, having all he needed, might save him. How were these to be got? We were penniless, there was not a soul to turn to, I was friendless and alone."

If ever guardian angel fought for man, Jack's now did battle nobly.

"Tell her your love," the tempter cried; "say why you left, say you were going to seek her."

"Leave her in peace," whispered the better voice; "knowing her love was yours, stain not her innocence by giving it life again."

"Did your father wish you to get married? how did you see—this man?"

"He came to Venice to see us, to seek us out, was good and kind to *him* beyond anything my words could tell you."

"And is he kind to you?"

Oh what an effort to get out the words, the clutch that caught his throat at the bare thought of her being happy!

"Yes, very kind; there is nothing he would not do to try and make me happy."

He nodded his head.

"Are you happy?" he asked after a pause, and the words were jerked out, strained and husky.

Robin's eyes avoided him.

"I think, yes, I was growing to be," she said faintly.

Was growing, *was* growing! that fiend voice would drive him mad, fevering his blood with fifty wild temptations.

"Did you know that I had written to your father that I was coming here?"

She shook her head; her eyes were turned away.

"I don't know now why you are here. Didn't you come to—to—seek after me?"

"Then your father never showed you the letter that I sent, telling him that my uncle was ill?" (she was looking, listening now). "He was Mr. Chandos, the

late Squire, who died. My name is Chandos now. I am the Squire here."

"You, Jack? You! What, will you live here—live here near me? Is it possible? Oh "

Words were not given to tell the transports of such joy. Christopher, her past troubles, her present surroundings, all vanished, swallowed up in the delight that she and Jack would be together again; together to talk of bygone days, to go over things they had done, places they had seen.

Jack, standing there, was the embodiment of all that past which of late had been growing daily more dear to Robin.

The anguish he had caused her, the tears she had shed for him, were forgotten. Already the grass was beginning to show green on the grave of that memory, and it was to the old master—teacher—she gave welcome, with the thought that the same friendship which had existed then would continue now.

Jack laughed, and it was a hard, bitter laugh he gave.

"You seem to forget that you have a husband now. I'm not so sure how he and I should agree."

"Oh! no one could fall out with Christopher."

"Indeed? I have managed already to pick a very respectable quarrel with his father."

Robin's face turned scarlet. Until that moment it seemed to her she had never thoroughly realized how vulgar Mr. Blunt was.

"Christopher is not at all like him," she said falteringly.

"Isn't he?" Jack answered drily.

And there was a pause—Jack still battling, Robin hesitating. It had come to her that she ought to speak of Christopher, to say something that would assure Jack of his goodness. It was disloyal, ungrateful, in her to permit anyone—least of all Jack—to suppose that Christopher resembled his father; besides which, there was something in Jack's tone, each time he

referred to her marriage, that jarred upon Robin, that stirred her with the sense that she ought to say something in defence of the husband who had been so generously good to her.

"I don't know how it was," she faltered, not knowing how to begin, "but neither of us, *he* nor I, ever spoke of you to Christopher. I don't think he ever heard your name."

"So much the better. He need not hear it now."

"How not hear it now?"

Robin's eyes were fixed on him in surprise.

"I mean that he need not hear it from you. I am leaving here to-morrow—leaving for a very long time"—he might forego her love, but he must see that he could still make her suffer—"perhaps never to return."

"Never to return!"

The light went out of her eyes, her face grew blank, her mouth quivered as she spoke.

"Doesn't it strike you," he said harshly, "that it's best I should go?"

She did not answer him.

"Oh, women! women!" he cried in thought, "What fools men are to suffer for them!"

It tortured him to believe that Robin could calmly contemplate the renewal of that mere friendly intercourse which once existed between them. If he could but make sure that she had not forgotten, had not entirely overcome the love which he knew he had once held entirely his own, he could leave her more contented.

"What good would there be in my remaining here?" he said. "You would be as far off from me as though the ocean rolled between us."

Was that true? Robin's heart was quickened by a crowd of new emotions—regret, reproach, compunction all rose up, battling within her.

"You have a husband now," Jack added; "one who you tell me is good, kind, fond of you. No doubt you care for him in return?" Between each

sentence he made pause. Did he hope she would contradict him?

Robin did not say a word.

"But why need I ask the question?" Jack was growing desperate. "If you had not cared for him—had not thought he could make you happier than any one else could—you would not have married him. I was not so very far off but a letter would have reached me."

"A letter about what?" she said. "How could you have helped us? In those days you were no better off than we were."

"That's true! I forgot that money always wins the day."

Robin's face was aflame.

"You dare to say that to me?" she said. "Jack, you have grown cowardly."

"No, I have only grown desperate," he said. "And what wonder, when I see you sacrificed to a man who made you the price of his seeming generosity. Oh, you may shake your head in denial; but if not, why did he insist on marrying you, knowing that you had no love for him?"

"He did not insist. No, Jack; it was I who insisted when I knew that *he* wished it, and that we both must live dependent on him. I would have it so. I would marry him."

"Your father deceived me," Jack exclaimed passionately. "He wrote me a letter saying you were to leave Venice; that you were going in search of some place where you might live quietly. What did he mean by that? At that very time this man must have been with you."

"I don't know," she said. "He never told me that he had written to you."

"Nor that I had written to him? Oh, I see it all now."

Jack's anger was mastering him.

"I was being cheated, fooled, made a dupe of!

This fellow was the very son-in-law he wanted—the one I advised him to look out after."

Not knowing what had passed between the two, the words cut Robin to the quick.

"He took your advice then, you see, and I have to thank him for it," she added, proudly. "I have a husband good and kind, generous to me beyond anything I can say;" and gathering up her strength for a final effort, she said, looking at him fixedly: "I would not change Christopher for any other man living."

Did that pale, stern face belong to Robin? could those eyes that Jack had seen melting with love, flash forth such fire? A fresh agony writhed his heart; this new variety but added to her beauty. He felt himself growing sick, giddy; his self-control was abandoning him; in another instant he would have to fling himself at her feet, implore her pity, entreat her not to forsake him. He had no more strength left than to wrestle with the horrible dread of giving way to his madness.

Bending his head as if in acknowledgment of what she had said, he managed to force out:

"I think it would be better that I no longer detained you."

Robin, oblivious of everything but the effort needed for her own control, made a gesture of assent. They were standing each as it were looking at the other, yet the eyes of both were averted.

"I can but offer you my somewhat tardy congratulations and wishes for a continuance of your present happiness and prosperity. I am not likely to see you again, therefore we shall be spared the awkwardness of future meeting." He paused. "Good-bye, Robin."

"Good-bye, Jack."

How long had he stood waiting for those words to come—an instant, minute, hour? He could not tell, only he knew that as she spoke she raised her eyes, and up there leaped in him a giant whose name until halfway through the wood Jack did not stay to ask.

The crackling boughs and leaves, and rustle of the

branches as he went madly on his way, proclaimed his flight to her he left behind.

Whether in love or anger, Jack was gone, and Robin stood alone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WITH just enough consciousness left to remember that on the road—into which from out of the thicket he would presently emerge—he might possibly meet persons walking, Jack endeavored to collect himself a little, to get his face into more everyday order, and to pull himself together again. This done, he walked on, his thoughts still so completely in mastery of his other senses that his usually quick ear did not catch sound of a horse's hoofs, suddenly put into motion, galloping quickly away.

Close to the hedge which on one side skirts the mound where three roads meet, only a short time before Georgy Temple might have been seen, standing raised in her stirrup, gazing intently at two figures who, while taking a survey of the thicket, had caught her eyes and arrested her attention.

To the casual passer-by the enclosure below was merely indicated by the clumped-together tops of irregularly grown trees; but Georgy, familiar with every landmark round, knew of a dwarfed, particular thorn, through the cleft stems of which you could get sight of the one really clear spot that the tangle beneath boasted of.

In olden days had she not often scrambled up that hedge in hopes of spotting Jack below? The smile that played around her mouth was brought there by the recollection of a certain whistle she used to give, attained by great pains and much practice, and gloried in, because, try as he did, stretching his mouth, with both his fingers in, as big as a clowns, Jack could produce no sound.

Georgy laughed outright ; what a hoyden she had been, more of a boy than Jack himself ! Dear old Jack ! she was very glad to have him back again ; and then she gave a little shrug, for the conversation they had had came back to her mind, and feeling certain that he meant by going away to bring back a wife, she sighed to think he couldn't live contented without more of womankind—" but there, we're queer beings all of us."

Evidently now her thoughts were centred on herself.

" I remember I had quite decided that as soon as I grew up I would marry Jack ; and it never entered into my arrangements to suppose that he would say 'No.' "

While making these reflections she had pulled up before the particular spot. Was the opening still visible ? Where the leaves grew thick they hid it out of view. From where she sat she thought that she ought to be able to see, and she raised herself, seemed filled with sudden surprise, bettered her position, and then remained transfixed.

Surely it was Jack ?—of that there could be no mistake ; but the other ? was it—yes, certainly it was, that movement ended the doubt—it was the bride, the new Mrs. Blunt. What were they doing there ?—standing evidently talking to each other so earnestly.

Before Georgy had time to imagine any answer to her questions, Jack suddenly wheeled round—he was gone ; and Georgy, not wishing then to meet him, touched up her horse and turned his head towards an opposite road, half-way down which she branched off by a lane that would bring her out close to the Manor gates.

She had rightly calculated ; a little ahead she saw Jack walking, and quickening her pace she seemed to accidentally overtake him.

" Well," she said, " have you managed your business satisfactorily ?"

For the instant, had a kingdom depended on it,

Jack could not remember what, when he parted with her, he had said he was going to do.

"Oh yes," he answered confusedly; "that is, I've changed my plans."

It would never do for him to dine that evening—as he had been asked to—at the rectory. He couldn't be himself, and talk of indifferent things to a lot of people. Like many men of the world whose feelings are but seldom roused, whenever they were, his *savoir faire* seemed completely to desert him.

"I'm very glad to have met you, Georgy," he began, "because if you don't mind, it will save me a walk up to your mother. Would you tell her from me that I shall not be able to dine with you this evening? I find I must start from here at once by the 6:40 train; it won't do for me to stay until to-morrow. Tell her I am awfully sorry, will you? but that I am really forced to go."

For once Georgy, generally so ready, could find nothing *a propos* to answer.

"Certainly I will," she said curtly; then after a moment's pause, "Are you going round to the Lodge? I'll walk Jacob alongside you."

"Do," said Jack, inwardly wishing that she and Jacob were at Jericho.

"What has made you so suddenly change your mind?" she said, as soon as they were going on together. "Where have you been since I left you?"

"Been! oh, to heaps of places, and there are ever so many more where I ought to go;" and then, meeting her look of inquiry, he continued, "And as to changing my mind, I don't know that my mind is changed; only I must go—and when you're resolved, what is the use of delaying?"

Georgy laughed.

"Positively," she said, "one might believe you were tearing yourself away, that you had some motive for going."

"Motive! what do you mean by motive? What pos-

sible motive could there be, except the one that pleases me? I don't understand you."

"No!" and she smiled at him meaningly; "perhaps we don't understand each other."

What on earth was the girl driving at! Surely no nonsense of any kind about him could have entered her head.

"My dear," he said gravely, "a great many people often jump at very wrong conclusions concerning each other."

She made a movement as if surprised at such an assertion.

"Yes, and yourself," he went on, "among the number. Only this morning at the Crossfields, when we were parting, you began throwing out hints about my going away; asking if it wasn't because I thought of marrying. Well, once for all I may tell you that nothing is further from my mind; but you know I was always very fond of traveling. I should be cramped to death to settle down here. I like a life of freedom, and freedom and marriage don't agree; besides which, have you forgotten that the Squires of Wadpole have mostly died old bachelors?"

Georgy assumed an attitude of utter despair. Bending towards Jack she held out her hand to him.

"Farewell, Jack," she said, mocking emotion. "Good-bye; to drown my disappointment I must set off at once in search of the deepest water."

CHAPTER XXV.

WHEN Mr. Blunt and Christopher returned late that evening it was to hear from the servants that Mrs. Blunt had not felt well, she had gone out into the grounds during the morning, but since her return she had kept her room.

"Best send for Heywood at once," said Mr. Blunt fussily.

Christopher begged him to wait until he had been up and seen Robin; and a few minutes later, he reappeared to say that she felt better now she had been lying down. She complained of headache, but would try and eat some dinner.

"Why, you're looking as white as a ghost," was Mr. Blunt's salutation, cheerily spoken, as if the sight of her pale face gave him immense satisfaction.

"You haven't been over-fatiguing yourself now while we've been away, have you? 'cos that'll never do."

Robin hastened to disown the supposition.

"I only walked a very little way," she said; "I didn't go out of the gates at all, so it couldn't be that."

"I'm very glad you didn't; you might have chanced on that Chandos, perhaps, swaggering about."

Jack's manner of ignoring them, and avoiding, as Mr. Blunt thought, an introduction to Christopher, had rankled within him all day.

"He's no gentleman that, I say, or when he met us he wouldn't have acted as he did."

"Very likely he felt it a little awkward," put in Christopher, "and the carriage passed so quickly by that there was really no need for his speaking."

"How d'ye mean no need? Miss Georgy could speak, why couldn't he? You haven't done nothing to offend him?"

Mr. Blunt, not in the best of humors, was glad of something to let off steam about. He had been in a state of ferment all day, for under the plea of other business, Christopher had made this the opportunity of asking his father what, now he was married, he thought of doing for him. He considered he ought to have a separate income, and—at best a poor diplomatist—at once discovered his motive by saying he wished it on account of Robin, so that in case anything happened to him she would have an independence settled upon her.

"Independence! what, you mean something independent of me?" asked the wary father.

"Exactly so," said the simple son. Upon which Mr. Blunt desired that he might be informed of the exact requirements demanded of him, advising that the sum should be talked over with Robin, and reserving to himself until then to give his answer.

All day long the proposition haunted him. Up to this time Christopher had never dropped a hint of needing such an arrangement. In his own case he had been contented with what his father gave him and the interest—about £200 a year—of some house-property which a distant relation of his mother's had left to him.

Could Robin have put him up to make this demand? Seeing it was to be settled on herself, Mr. Blunt thought it not unlikely. Several times leading up to the question, he had beaten the bush to try and get the truth from Christopher, but his son evidently did not understand him, and feeling it would be unwise to ask the direct question, Mr. Blunt had been compelled to swallow his curiosity. To a man so dispositioned this acted irritably on his temper, and he was in a mood to find fault when the sight of Robin's evident indisposition turned his thoughts to another channel; but though for her sake he might spare those present, there was no occasion to hold his tongue about the Squire, and he continued to rake up the dispute about the thicket, what he had not said to him, and what he should like to say to him, until Christopher, noting Robin's face grow paler and that she sat quite silent, said, in hopes of silencing him:

"Oh, well, never mind now; it won't matter in the least what you think of him or he thinks of you. I saw Cameron in at Topham's, and he told me that Mr. Chandos went off by the 6:40 train; he saw him down at the station; he was going to try and get the night train from London. I don't know what night train nor where he was going, but to some place abroad at a long distance; and how long he may stay or when he will return seemed quite uncertain."

Mr. Blunt said something to express his satisfaction, but what, Christopher did not heed. The alteration in Robin's face had attracted his attention.

"What is the matter, Robin?"

He got up and went towards her.

"You're not feeling well; what is it—tell me?"

Seized with a mad desire to push him away, Robin had to make an effort at control.

"I don't know," and she gave a ghastly smile. "I felt so much better when I came down. I think it's the smell of the dinner must have upset me."

"That's it," said Mr. Blunt, confidentially; "it often does so, my dear; it's turned you sick, I dare say."

"Yes," said Robin, catching at any excuse for going away.

"I shall have to go back to my own room again; only, Christopher, don't you come." Her voice sounded quite sharply. "Jennings is upstairs; she will attend to me."

A little hurt, Christopher lacked the assurance to follow her; he fancied she spoke as if she did not wish him to come. He went as far as the foot of the stairs, watched that she ran quickly up, and then returned to the dinner-table.

"I hope there is nothing the matter with her," he said, anxiously.

"And I hope there is," said his father, pointedly. "So there's the difference between me and you;" and then he emptied his glass as if drinking a health, smacked his lips, and had it filled again. "We'll go to-morrow and get Heywood to drop in as he's passing here—just make a call; he needn't to say nothing."

"Oh, no; there'll be no occasion for that."

Christopher spoke hastily; he was frightened as to what Robin might feel.

"It's not likely to be anything but a headache, which I dare say will pass off by the morning; if it should not, I'll ask her what she would like me to do."

The presence of the servants restrained Mr. Blunt from indulging in the outburst to which he would have liked to treat his son. Leaning back in his chair, he swelled out his portly person and made a continuous chirrup with his lips, as was his wont when imploring a sympathetic Providence to grant him patience.

All his thoughts, his hopes, his wishes, were centred now in the desire that he should speedily see children born to Christopher, heirs who would relieve him of that terrible anxiety he always suffered whenever anything ailed his son.

The prospect of a fine sturdy boy to dandle on his knee softened his heart, and he spent the evening in building castles, arranging his affairs, and drinking a great deal more hot grog than was good for him.

Robin during this time was going through all those torments we endure when our doubts and fears are turned to certainties. Until those casual words dropped by Christopher about Jack's departure, the poor heart had not known how desperately it had clung to the hope of his remaining.

Even while she had continued to say to herself, "He will go, we shall not meet again," the certainty that he would remain contradicted her.

Now he was gone—gone for years—perhaps for ever. Oh, she had so counted on his presence? Together they could bring back those dear departed days, together live them over again. With Jack she could open her heart freely, speak of her father, ask counsel about Christopher, give vent to the repugnance she felt creeping over her towards Mr. Blunt.

During the weary months that followed on their last separation, Robin had well schooled herself in the certainty that, in the way she had wanted, Jack could not care for her; very tenderly and humbly she had sought to strangle the love he had called into being, and believing it to be dead, she had buried it in a grave which she had long kept green by watering it with her tears.

Sorrow, altered circumstances, fresh surroundings, all had combined to distract her; so that when she found herself brought face to face with Jack, it was the friend she gave welcome to, the old companion of her early years, without any embarrassment that she had ever made him her lover.

To Jack's manner was due the rankling which she now felt, mingled with her suffering. His tone, his looks, the words he had let drop, had all fallen as seeds of discontent amid what had been hitherto satisfaction: the drop of honey in her cup of gall had been a certain self-complacency, that, although it had proved of no avail, she had sacrificed herself to the utmost.

Suddenly this sweetness had lost its flavor, and she was racking herself with questions of why had she married at all? Why had Christopher been thrown in her way? Why had she not written to Jack? Suppose she had. What now? The sigh that came from Robin seemed to rend her breast.

"Did you speak—say anything?"

Christopher had crept softly in, and had remained sitting out of sight.

"What!"

A fear clutched her—could she have spoken aloud! She opened her eyes and started up.

"Oh, Christopher! I wish you wouldn't come and frighten me so!" she said petulantly, turning herself away from him.

"Dear, I have been here ever so long; only before you lay so quiet, that when I heard you move and sigh, I thought you were awake perhaps, and wanted something."

"No," Robin could command her actions better than her words; she stretched out her hand to him—"only to be left quiet," she added.

"Do you mind me sitting here?"

"I'd rather you went away

Christopher turned to go.

Robin was stirred by compunction.

"Christopher, you don't think me unkind, do you? I don't want to be."

"Unkind! No: why should I think you unkind because you don't want to be fidgeted by me? for fidgety I am, and always shall be, I fear, whenever the slightest tning is the matter with you. The toll we pay for love is anxiety."

"But there is nothing to be anxious about. I am not ill. I haven't anything the matter with me."

"Nothing the matter! and you lying here! that is not like my Robin, I am sure."

The words were so tenderly spoken that they dropped like dew on Robin's fevered heart. Should she tell him—tell him all? Confide in him about Jack, of her meeting with him, and who he had proved to be?

She hesitated; a something which she would not own, which she resolutely turned away from her, rose unbidden and held her back. She knew that she might trust Christopher, that he was worthy of her confidence, it was not that which stopped her, it was something in herself. Still—after all—perhaps . . .

The opportunity was gone. Christopher, recalling what she had said, pressed her hand with his lips, and before she had fully made up her mind what she would do, he turned away and went out of the room.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ROBIN'S appearance at breakfast the next morning, recovered and her usual self, disowning any remaining trace of indisposition, and laughing at the bare idea of having a doctor to see her, did not tend to improve the bad temper in which Mr. Blunt had arisen. Possibly the reaction from his self-indulgence of the night before had something to do with his state; when he went to bed his castles were stories high: he had awakened with a sense that they were crumbling, and now he saw them shattered and laid low.

Added to this, Sunday was a day which always tried him; its minutes seemed to drag themselves out to hours, and he was glad of any prospect which offered some change of the routine of church-going, in which the example set by his neighbors had to be followed.

He had intended that Dr. Heywood should have been asked to pay his call at luncheon-time; this would have insured him hearing all the gossip for twenty miles round. And on his part he had arranged what he would say regarding Mr. Chandos, about whom now he would no longer keep silent; he should tell the doctor that he was free to repeat his words to anybody, and by this means he fancied it not impossible that they might reach the ears of the Squire himself.

As is usually the case when cheerfulness is the result of effort, Robin's spirits seemed unusually high, and this in its self aggravated Mr. Blunt and made him resentful towards her.

The suspicion concerning that money transaction came back with renewed force; he felt perfectly convinced that she had "put Christopher up to it," and he cautioned himself to be on his guard, and keep tight hold of the purse-strings, for fear by independence his authority might be slackened. Christopher dead, Robin left with children, unless he kept some hold over her, who could say how she might treat him? "No, no!" It was very well now all was fine-weather sailing, but he hadn't forgotten to whom she belonged, nor how "that who" had served him; and he raked among his recollections in search of bygone slights and injuries, banking up his ill-humor and setting it smouldering.

Unfortunately familiar with the look upon his father's face, Christopher, noting the impatience of his movements and the surly tone of his voice, felt particularly uneasy.

Up to the present time Robin had seen nothing of his ill-temper, and whatever rough speech he had

indulged in had never for a moment rested on her; but this morning she evidently did not please him—his tea was too sweet, he had it thrown away; in the next cup given him, she put too much milk; in each remark she made—and, poor soul, what an effort it cost her to make one!—he found something to contradict, until, with that unlucky fate which generally leads persons at cross-purposes to touch on some sore subject, Robin, reminded by something Christopher said of Sundays abroad, referred to a particular one which they all had spent in Venice together. Since she had seen Jack her father had been so in her thoughts that his name—seldom mentioned by her before Mr. Blunt—slipped out inadvertently.

Christopher, plunging into a long-winded, round-about reply, hoped that his father was not going to notice it. Illusory supposition! Mr. Blunt had been itching for something to be dropped that he could catch up and be offensive about.

His state was by no means singular. In Wadpole that very morning a finger might have been placed on a good score of persons, old and young of both sexes, who, to their own torment, and the torment of their families, felt themselves in a similar disposition; but among them all not one labored under the disadvantages which beset Mr. Blunt; from whom, the moment his good-humor forsook him, the thin veneering of social polish vanished completely, and you saw the man as nature had left him, coarse, rough, bullying, with no comprehension of any of those finer feelings about which he himself knew nothing.

A great many of the wounds he gave he had no idea of giving; and he prided himself on forgetting the injuries he received far sooner than those who had injured him forgave the rebuffs he gave them.

Only waiting till Christopher had so far delivered himself that he might feel certain of commanding Robin's undivided attention, Mr. Blunt gave vent to a succession of snorts intended by him as a laugh, but

which might be taken for anything indicating contempt and derision.

"That's good," he said, "about Sundays; he must have precious altered before church-going was anything in your father's way."

The sneering tone and manner, more than the words, made Robin's cheeks scarlet; for a moment she was silent; about her father caring to go to church there was nothing she could say. How often, since Christopher had talked to her, had she lamented that she had not been more persistent in her urging. It was true that at times she had asked him to go with her, but when he declined she was quite content that he should stay away; Jack didn't go, why should *he?* In those days Jack had been Robin's standard of morality and consistency.

"He never interfered with me though, papa didn't," she said, looking up in reply to Mr. Blunt. "When I was old enough to do as I liked, and I could go, I always went to church every Sunday, more especially latterly;" and in an instant her memory had traveled back, and she saw herself setting off to go, because perhaps God would listen to her there, would hear her prayers better, would spare her father to her.

A burst of tears followed on her words.

"Robin! Robin!"

Christopher was beside her.

"It's because it made me think of him," she sobbed, "and how I used to hope he would get better."

Christopher passed his hand tenderly over the bent head, trying to soothe her. He knew how uncontrollably these bursts of sorrow came, and how bravely she tried to subdue them. Already she was wiping their traces away.

"If you're going to give way to the habit of every time anything's spoken of treating us to a set-out of tears, Robin, it's best for to know that I for one can't stand it; I never could in my life, and I ain't going to begin now. It's what I never was accustomed to—

crying in females, more particularly when there's nothing to cry for. It's true you may have lost your father, but that's in the course of nature. Everybody if they live to sooner or later, must some time or nother lose their fathers."

"Well, of course she knows that," said Christopher, "although what difference it makes I can't see. It's only very natural that she should sorrow for him, seeing how devoted they were to each other.'

Mr. Blunt laughed offensively

"Oh well," he said, "I suppose it's the right way: spend every farthing you can lay your hand on , beggar your wife, leave your daughter dependent on charity, and you'll be lamented as the best father that ever was. It's something new to me, though. I'd hoped my daughter-in-law would have showed more sense than to try and teach me the lesson. I'm willing enough to let bygones be bygones. I don't want to rake up the past, nor to have names mentioned that I never speak of—only, if they are, don't treat me to a scene which leads to a regular upset;" and jumping up, he pushed back his chair violently, seemed as if he was going out of the room, altered his mind and came back again.

Perhaps he was expecting that she would say something. Robin tried to stifle her sense of injury. Her eyes, dry of tears now, were opened to the full, bright and sparkling; a spot of color had come out on either cheek; she held her head more than usually erect, and her voice, when she spoke, was high-toned.

"I am sorry if I have made you at all uncomfortable, uncle," she said, addressing him. "I will take care it does not happen again ; but to speak as you have just done of my father to me, is not kind of you."

"Oh, indeed, isn't it?" said Mr. Blunt surlily. "Well, I'm the best judge of that."

"No, I don't think you are. I cannot suppose that you knew how much it would wound me, or I don't believe that you would have said it."

"I tell you what it is, young lady, you know very little about what's happened between your father and me, so the less you take me to task about it the better we two shall get on together."

His wrath was beginning to increase. Christopher, dreading a further display of it, hastened to be peace-maker.

"Come come, father," he said, "let us say no more about the matter I am sure you must see that Robin had no thought of vexing you any more than you wished to wound her. So, let's forget all about it."

But, quick to note, Mr. Blunt saw that as he spoke he took Robin by the hand, an evidence, to his mind. that he sided with her.

"Two against one," he thought; "and that's what it will be in future if I don't put down my foot upon it." So, assuming more displeasure than he positively felt, he said:

"Easier said than done, at my time of life. You must, both of you, try and keep it in mind that I'm master of this house, and therefore expect to be a little studied."

"Well, I hope you have had no reason to complain of that so far," said Christopher. "I'm sure Robin has entirely devoted herself to you."

"Oh, dear, bless me heart! I don't want her to make a trial of what there's plenty as good as she, and better too, would look upon as a pleasure. There must be a fat lot to complain of in eating and drinking of the best, having a carriage to ride in, and not being asked to soil a finger, especially to one who's been so very much used to that sort o' thing as she has."

It was Christopher's face that grew scarlet. A glance at him showed Robin how his father's words were paining him In a moment she had gone over to where the old man stood, and stretching out her hands to him:

"Uncle," she said, "you know that is not what Christopher means. He knows—and I know, too—

how very kind you have been to me, and if I have in any way said anything to offend you, forgive it; only—only when—when you speak of my father——"

Her rising tears began to choke her, and unable to stem the torrent, she ran out of the room, leaving the father and son alone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BEFORE Robin and Mr. Blunt met again, Christopher and he had come to a very decided understanding, the result of which was a promise that Mr. Veriker's name should be if possible avoided, or, if spoken of before his daughter, should be respected.

Accustomed to tacit submission from his son, Mr. Blunt was not a little surprised to find that in this first measure of swords between them, Christopher was decidedly the victor. It had not struck him so much in the midst of his loud talking and bluster; but, after, when he reflected, his sense showed him that he had been decidedly worsted.

"If I don't take care," he said, "between the two of them I shall be made a complete puppet of—my word won't be valued more than that!" and he snapped his fingers figuratively.

During the whole day the thought stayed by him, and kept him silent and brooding, so that Robin and Christopher were but little troubled by his company.

"Now you mustn't think any more about it," the good fellow said, fearing that Robin was still dwelling on the domestic misadventure; and observing that, though she assured him she had completely forgotten the matter, her eyes were heavy and all she said came by effort, he rejoiced when rather late in the evening the servant announced Mr. Cameron, who had come, as he frankly told them, to see Mrs. Blunt.

"Perhaps I ought," he said, "to make some apology for the lateness of the hour; but the truth is that the

rectory people are coming to-morrow, and I wanted to steal a march upon them."

"What, the Temples!" exclaimed Robin. "Are they coming? I'm so glad! I'm looking forward to seeing the Temples. To-day at church I so liked the look of the children with them."

The untidy run-wild little Spencers had touched a chord of sympathy with her own neglected childhood.

"I hope Miss Temple will like me. I have taken quite a fancy to her."

Mr. Cameron laughed and rubbed his hands together delightedly; and Robin encouraged by something in his face or in the movement, and relieved by the sense that Mr. Blunt was not there, spoke openly of her having had, so far as companions went, a lonely childhood; that she had known but very few girls, and had never formed an intimacy with any of them. This led to Christopher speaking of his bringing-up; in turn Mr. Cameron told them of his early days, and somehow the hearts of the three seemed opened out to each other, and they went on chatting until the clock striking eight made Mr. Cameron jump up in haste to go.

"I didn't know I was stopping so late," he said. "I have to go to the rectory yet."

And then Christopher, having gone with him to the door and across the terrace to the steps, in his frank, outspoken way he said, holding him by the hand:

"I like her—like her very much indeed; she's nice—very nice! I believe that your marriage will prove a blessing to you, and that you both will be very happy."

Christopher's sensibilities were still sore, and the touch, gentle though it was, made them smart again.

"I only hope that I may be able to secure happiness to her," he said, a little despondingly; and looking at him, Mr. Cameron perceived that his face was troubled.

"Is it with your father that you fear a little difficulty?" he asked, with that perception many who minister hold, of at once placing the finger on the cause of sorrow.

Christopher's silence told him that he had guessed rightly.

"Oh, but you must not let that come between you: little outside crosses should only, so it seems to me, serve to draw closer together two who love each other. You must take courage and show confidence in yourself, that she is ready to bear anything for you."

The latter part of the sentence had been called forth by Christopher's doubtful shake of the head.

"Oh!" he said, "when I look at her it always strikes me in the same way, so impossible that she should ever care for me as I care for her."

More than this little outburst with his father, was a certain chill between him and Robin, not the result of it, for he had felt it more particularly the evening before, when she had seemed to turn away from him, and instead of demanding, had only endured the small attentions which, more particularly, seeing she was not well, he longed to lavish on her.

Mr. Cameron seemed to be reflecting on his words.

"Do you mean, because of the difference in outward appearance between you?" he asked simply.

"Well, yes, for one thing—that is a great stumbling-block in the way."

"I suppose it is—I don't know, though, that it had occurred to me before to think so; still, if it's natural to give more admiration to the oak than to the bramble, why not to a tall, handsome, well-made fellow rather than—such as I."

"Or I," put in Christopher, laughing at what he looked on as a change in the pronoun. "Depend on it," he added, "that good looks go a long way with women as well as with us men."

"And yet I don't know." Mr. Cameron seemed quite interested in the question. "I have been thrown—more particularly before I came here—among many who were counted, by everybody who saw them, beauties, and yet they never attracted me."

"That I can believe—it happens to us all; until the

one particular *she* comes, whose face our heart reflects, and then we feel no other can compare with her."

"Mrs. Blunt is considered by everybody very lovely, isn't she?"

"People always appear to admire her, it seems to me"—and his attention caught by Mr. Cameron's earnest manner of inquiry, he added, "Why?"

"Oh nothing, nothing, I only wanted to know. Good-bye now, good-bye," and shaking hands, he went off hurriedly, leaving Christopher standing watching him as he disappeared down the avenue.

"He's an odd fellow," he soliloquized, "but I can speak more openly to him than any one I know; no matter what it's about, he manages to give me sympathy. I feel better now, although it's not from what he has said to me. Love isn't much in his line, I fancy; he'd find it hard, I dare say, to win any woman he wanted to marry."

Mr. Cameron hastening down to the lodge gate, out of it, and along the lane, was saying to himself as he went: What an odd thing it was that to him no face ever seemed able to bear comparison with Georgy Temple's; even by the side of this beautiful Mrs. Blunt—and while Robin was talking he had been particularly attracted by her beauty—he should give the preference to Georgy.

After church that morning, there had been a very general discussion of Robin's appearance, with a universal verdict in its favor. Everyone who spoke of her pronounced that to look at she was charming. Georgy was the only one who in any way dissented. Nothing about Robin seemed to please her, and, astonished at such an unaccountable prejudice, Mr. Cameron determined at once, by seeking an introduction, to find out if there was any reason why she should imply that she did not mean to be intimate with her.

More than favorably impressed by the visit he had made, he was now hurrying to the rectory, delighted at the good report he should have to give to Georgy,

and bent upon using all his influence to dispose her to take a warm interest in their new neighbor.

"Is—— Have they finished?"

Not able to decide the nature of the Sunday meal, which he hoped was over, he found it easier to turn the question.

The domestic who opened the door, without committing herself, indicated that they were all in there. At this Liberty Hall, Sunday was a day of liberty: servants went out or stayed at home, as they felt inclined, and the family got what they could when they could, and went without what had not been provided for them.

Opening the door of the dining-room, for the curate was too frequent a visitor for it to be thought needful to announce him, Mr. Cameron found everybody still seated at the table, towards which he advanced with the certain assurance of being welcomed, when, overcome by amazement, he stopped. His eye did not deceive him—there sat the Squire!

"Why—you! I thought you had gone abroad—to stay ever so long?"

"Yes; did you?" said Jack, with a happy ignoring that it was any one's business to wonder what had brought him back. "If I move a little nearer to you, Georgy, Mr. Cameron will find room by Dora."

But Mr. Cameron did not seem disposed to accept the place proposed for him.

"No, don't disturb yourselves," he said, without moving or taking his eyes off Jack. "Well, you do surprise me to find you here," and though he did not make the demand in words, his face asked for some explanation.

With a little look at Jack, whose attention was concentrated on his supper, Georgy came to the rescue.

"He came back," she said, "because, I think, he could not bear to leave me; or else he has decided to break my heart entirely by changing his route and going instead to India."

"To India?"

"Yes; he has a mamma in India. Perhaps you did not know that?"

She spoke in a tone of banter which seemed to mystify Mr. Cameron. He suddenly felt out of place, ill at ease, the more so because for the moment he could not remember what had brought him to the rectory—why he had come there.

"Oh, I know," he said in his impulsive way. "I came to speak about the Blunts. I have been making a call there—seeing my friend Christopher's new wife. She is very nice, Miss Georgy. I'm sure you'll like her when you know her."

"When I know her, perhaps I shall," said Georgy, with a little scornful screw of her mouth; "but I thought I had made it plain to you that I had no intention of knowing her."

A glance at Jack showed her his attention was arrested. He looked at them both, quickly, from one to the other.

"But you told me that you intended to call," he said.

"Certainly, I shall have to call with mother, but that binds me to nothing. I need never go again."

"That seems a little strange—rather unneighborly?"

Glad of an ally, Mr. Cameron had drawn up his chair and sat down. He was looking at Jack assentingly.

"My dear Jack," and Georgy's straightforward gaze sought his, "I am just as free to choose my friends as you are yours, and, if you remember, you distinctly announced your determination of cutting the Blunts altogether."

"My dear Georgy, permit me to remark that I often say a great deal more than I mean, and therefore I warn you against taking me *au pied de la lettre*."

"It was a pity you tried to influence me, then."

"I never presumed to suppose you would be guided by my opinions."

"Really! And we two—as Miss Boothby remarked to mamma, to-day—cut out so exactly by Nature, as it were, for each other."

Mrs. Temple coughed noisily, as if a crumb had gone the wrong way. She thought Georgy was showing her hand too openly, and wanted to attract her attention.

"That'll do, mother; I see you frowning at me. Mother fears I am wearing my heart too much on my sleeve," she said, turning to Mr. Cameron.

"Does she?" he said absently.

He could not make Georgy out to-night, and he could not make himself out either. Coming along he had felt so happy and jolly; now he felt miserable and discontented.

"I suppose, after all, it will be the right thing to do, sir, to call on these Blunts?"

Jack was addressing the rector, who, apart from the others, was deep in a paper, puffing out volumes of smoke, and drinking deeply of cold tea.

Notwithstanding his seeming abstraction, he had heard, as he always did, every word that was going on around him; only, until actually appealed to, he never troubled himself to enter the list of arguers.

"Call on them; of course you'll call. You're not the chap you used to be if you're going to visit the sins of a vulgar old brute of a father on the head of his inoffensive son."

Jack smiled his thanks for his old friend's good opinion.

"I'm afraid I've made it a little awkward by being rather stiff-necked over this dispute about the thicket land," he said. "You must try, if you can, to help me out in the matter, sir. Tell them I hadn't a fairy godmother to bestow 'on me the gift of good temper.'"

This was an allusion to a story the children had been reading to him.

"Leave that to me," said the rector, confidently. "You don't know old Blunt yet. He'll be ready to lick the dust off your boots if he can only once get

you inside his door. But that's not the case with his son. Christopher's a gentleman, whatever his father may be."

"He has managed to get a very pretty girl for a wife," put in Mrs. Temple, with a certain degree of asperity; "and if she is at all a lady, he ought to consider himself a very fortunate young man, for of course no one about here would have had him."

"Well, they hadn't the chance," said Georgy, "seeing he never asked them."

"You don't know that he never asked them."

"I know that he never asked me."

"Perhaps you wish he had?" said Jack, teasingly.

"No, I don't. But perhaps you do."

"I?"

Knowing what Georgy did, Jack a little overdid his astonishment.

"What possible motive can you have for saying that?"

But without making any answer, Georgy moved from her seat and went over to the other end of the room. Could she be jealous of Robin's good looks? Jack wondered. This sudden prejudice seemed a mystery—one which that night, however, Georgy was not disposed that he should unravel, for she fetched a chair and sat down, so that she could lend her aid to the singing of the hymns which had been commenced by the children and her sister.

Jack, in the meantime, returned to the subject of this visit he wished to pay; and Georgy, who kept one ear at their disposal, heard him and her father enter into the arrangements for going to the Blunts the next afternoon.

"It will lessen the awkwardness," said Jack, "if there are others there beside me. I can seem to have called at that time by accident. They need not know that we arranged to go together."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE next morning Mr. Temple so arranged his plans that a seemingly chance meeting brought him face to face with Mr. Blunt.

"The very man I was thinking of," said the rector, with a shake of the hand more than usually cordial. "I was wondering as I came along whether I shouldn't meet you."

Mr. Blunt's face beamed with satisfaction. It was what he desired, to be greeted in this neighborly way; and to add to his satisfaction, on hearing that he was going into Wadpole Mr. Temple altered his route, in order to go as far as the Green with him.

"Have you heard that the Squire is back again?" he began, after they had gone on some way chatting on indifferent subjects.

No; Mr. Blunt had heard nothing of the kind, and the words in which he said so were spoken rather huffily.

"Yes; he seems to have altered his plans—it's the fashion with these young people. We didn't do it, did we, in our day? He has come back and intends stopping, so he says."

Mr. Blunt made no remark; he was turning over in his own mind how he should give the rector his opinion of Mr. Dorian-Chandos's behavior.

"What's he swelling himself out like a bloated frog for?" thought the rector—Mr. Blunt when attacked by rising choler had the habit of expanding all the loose flesh about his person. "Something's brewing in the fellow; I'd best have my say before he begins."

"He was with us last night," he went on aloud; "most days he spends half his time with my girls and me—he was so much among us in bygone days that it only seems natural to see him there. He's a good fellow; little hot-headed, but it's soon over. By the way, you and he had a little dispute about that thicket land down there, hadn't you?"

Ah, now they were coming to it. Mr. Blunt had his statement all ready, but before he could speak the rector ran on with :

"Yes, I thought so ; he was saying as much to me. Ah well, you musn't let that interfere with your living good neighbors. I needn't tell you what he said about it ; but I told him that he didn't know you, and I did, and if he liked to pay his respects to your daughter-in-law this afternoon, my people were going, and he could go with them, and I'd be guarantee for you giving him a good reception."

Mr. Blunt's face became perfectly iridescent in the rush of pride which swamped his anger. Coherent words failed him, and he could but stutter out something about acting the part of a gentleman, on which ground people would always find him ready to meet them.

The rector nodded his complete assurance, and his task ended, he speedily found an opportunity of remembering an engagement which would take him in an opposite direction.

He disliked Mr. Blunt heartily, and oddly enough—for he was ever lenient to failings—judged him hardly. That seeming readiness to put his self-respect into his pocket, his eagerness to elbow his way into the society of those who looked down upon him, drew forth the contempt of the rector, who, had Mr. Blunt assumed no other position than the one his own energy had helped him to, would have respected him, have given him the hand of good-fellowship, and have been delighted to bear him company.

The struggles endured, the resolution maintained by those who have climbed, step by step, Fortune's ladder, have a wonderful fascination for most men, more especially for indolent natures such as Mr. Temple's. The rector knew well that talents had been committed to his own care, but so long a time had gone by since he used them, that he had even forgotten where they lay buried.

That morning Mr. Blunt did not waste much time in Wadpole; he was all anxiety to get back and make his announcement to Christopher and Robin. Mr. Dorian-Chandos, according to his showing to Christopher—Robin was not present—had come to his senses, and though the rector had gone a roundabout way to manage it, had as good as asked if a visit from him would be agreeable.

"The Temples are coming this afternoon"—the Boothbys the day before had intimated as much. "Oh, you'll see, we shall have them all here before long," and he rubbed his hands delightedly—at length he should see Christopher among the country society.

And going into the drawing-room he walked about, looking here and there, oppressed with the idea that some one ought to be bustling about setting things in order.

Repose of mind or manner is very difficult to attain to by persons of Mr. Blunt's order.

Wishing to prepare Robin for the probable state of excitement in which she would find his father, Christopher went in search of her.

She was in the little morning-room, sitting close by the window, looking out; her work lay beside her. At sound of Christopher's entering she caught it up, and while he told his news she sewed industriously, her needle flying, seeming to keep time to her heart, which was set beating violently.

"I expect, if the truth was known, it's Miss Georgy Temple that's bringing him back," said Christopher, who had gone on talking, without waiting for an answer. "Everybody says they are cut out for each other, and that they'll marry some day."

Hand and heart seemed paralyzed; the needle was in the work, but Robin could find no strength to draw it out.

"You ought to get on well with this Mr. Chandos," continued Christopher; "he has lived a great deal abroad, they tell me: you and he perhaps will be able

to talk in French and Italian together. You'll like that, won't you?"

Bending more over her work Robin gave a nod of her head in reply.

"Come, put down that old work, do," said Christopher persuasively, "and have a turn in the garden with me. We shan't dare to propose a longer walk now we know these people are coming to see you;" and going nearer to her he stooped down, trying to catch sight of her face, telling her as he did so that he had thought her looking pale that day.

"Christopher"—tossing aside her work, Robin had sprung to her feet—"I want to say something—I've something to tell you. I know this Mr. Chandos who is coming here—he used to be called Dorian; he knew papa and me too."

No one could call her face pale now. Up to the temples the crimson color had rushed, brought there by the sudden impulse which had stamped her resolution.

In the midst of that whirlpool of disappointment, pain, pleasure—all so mixed together that she did not know the cause for either—there had suddenly leaped up the feeling that she must tell Christopher—tell him all—and when he knew, ask him to take her away.

"Knew you! knew your father!" Christopher's calm, astonished air fell as a chill on Robin's hot resolves.

"Yes," she said; "in old days we were constantly together."

The trembling within was so great that unless she spoke slowly he would hear her teeth chatter.

"Why, you silly little girl," he said, hoping that by not seeming to see her emotion she would better overcome it, "how was it you didn't tell me that before?"

"I didn't know it—he had changed his name." She could speak with greater ease now, ask herself what had made her feel so oddly before.

"Perhaps, after all, though, you may find he is not the same man?"

Christopher spoke hopefully.

"Yes, he is; I met him on Saturday."

"On Saturday—here?"

"In the wood, by accident; and he told me that now his uncle was dead, and he was the Squire here."

Christopher looked pained.

"You wonder why I did not tell you," she went on. "I meant to—I wanted him to know you; but perhaps because of his quarrel with uncle, he——" and she stopped.

"Oh, I can well understand," Christopher said, only too pleased that his father should be the cause of hesitation; "in the morning, when we passed him, I saw he wanted to avoid us."

"He knew no more of my being here then, than I did about him." What ease it had given her, this speaking to Christopher! "He was going to Venice to look after us; he did not know what had happened to him, nor that I was married to you."

"No; didn't he? It is then so long since you saw him?"

"Oh, it seems ages ago to me——" and she paused for a moment, looked dreamily, "but really it was but a short time before you came to us that he left Venice."

Completely disarmed of suspicion, Christopher said:

"And you met this friend, and you were not going to tell me? I think I ought to scold you, you know."

"I wanted to tell you all the time," she said earnestly.

Christopher gave her a little shake of the hand.

"Now I see," he said, "what it was that upset you while we were away."

"Yes. It has brought so much of the past back to me. I knew him when I was a child; he told me so many things that since then you have told me, Christopher," and raising her eyes swimming with tears, she added, "Except you, I never knew anyone but him talk to me about doing things that are right and good."

"He sowed the seed then," he said, looking at her tenderly.

"No; you did that. He tilled the ground, perhaps," and she smiled back at him.

She could smile now—that fit of madness which for a time had swept over her had passed away. Christopher's presence and attentions were no longer oppressive: if he touched her, she did not shrink away, but sat with her hand in his, telling him about Jack, what he had been to her, what he had been to her father; and as they talked, the great burden of her discontent seemed to melt, and not knowing enough of her woman's weak nature to discern that it was the sun of that presence which was drawing near, she cheated herself into the belief that her happiness was restored solely for the reason that she had confided in Christopher.

"I shall never keep a secret again from you," she said—"never."

"That is all I can ask of you;" and he sighed to think how far his wishes outstripped his words.

"It is only as it should be with husbands and wives—they ought to trust each other, shouldn't they?"

"They ought to. I should like to think you could always trust me."

"I mean to. Oh, Christopher, you are very good!" she said, looking at him seriously. "I used to think he—Jack—Mr. Chandos, you know, could do nothing wrong, until I knew you."

It was the truth she spoke. Unknowingly Christopher had many a time served as a standard by which Robin saw flaws and imperfections in one she had before held faultless.

"I am afraid his temper is not an easy one to get on with. Papa always used to say it wasn't; he would take everything so seriously, you know."

Christopher had none the worse opinion of him for that. He could easily imagine how trying to a man of even not the strictest principles Mr. Veriker might be;

and the somewhat vague reports of Mr. Chandos's antecedents coming back, he thought it not improbable that the present Squire of Wadpole would rather have it forgotten that he had been once Jack Dorian.

"I wonder what he intends doing," he said. "Do you think he means to recognize you? It will be very awkward if he doesn't, won't it?"

"I couldn't bear it—it would be impossible. If he does that and stays, Christopher, we shall have to go away."

Christopher was silent for a moment; the sense of his position weighed upon him. Robin's seeming indisposition had driven that question of a separate income out of his mind; now it must be returned to and settled upon without further delay.

"I can't think," he said, looking at her, "how it is I never heard you mention him—this Mr. Chandos. And your father, too, he used to speak so frequently of people he had known, to me."

"Oh, he has spoken of him."

"Not by name, or I should have recollected it again."

"I used to think that by his not writing, papa thought that Jack neglected him—he was very sensitive, poor dear, about anything of that kind. He got to be quite morbid about people forgetting him, and not wanting to seem to know him; and I noticed how he left off ever speaking of Jack. Perhaps it was in my mind to—I used to think he might have written to us."

Christopher was going to ask more, when the ringing of the luncheon-bell interrupted the conversation.

Robin half rose, and then sat down again as if hesitating.

"Would you rather not go down?" said Christopher, anticipating her wishes.

"Much rather not. It's uncle; he is sure to begin speaking of it, and I shan't quite know what to say."

"All right; I'll find some excuse why you are not there, and I'll send your luncheon to you."

"And then after, if I go into the garden you'll meet me there, and we'll stroll about together quietly, you and I."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"MRS. AND MISS TEMPLE, ma'am, have called to see you," was the summons which had brought Robin to the drawing-room.

She and Christopher had had their stroll in the garden, and a long talk together, which had served almost entirely to restore Robin's former equanimity; she still felt terribly nervous at the thought of meeting Jack, but that strange turmoil of emotions, so suddenly stirred within her, had calmed gradually down and subsided.

"Had he come with them?"

Her heart was in a flutter; she could not put the question, but the words kept repeating themselves until she was in the room, receiving Mrs. Temple's languid congratulations, Georgy's unusually stiff greeting, but all the while with eyes and ears for nobody but Jack.

"Mr. Dorian Chandos, Robin," she heard Christopher saying; and instinct must have made her turn in his direction, for her hand was taken and Jack was speaking—saying something to her—something about his surprise at this meeting, his astonishment at seeing her.

"Is it as I fear, that you don't remember me?" he said anxiously, and the poor little hand which lay so cold in his was almost crushed as he waited for the answer.

"I think she is quite overcome by astonishment." It was Christopher who had come to the rescue, and who, by talking very quickly to Mrs. Temple and

Georgy on the score of unexpected recognitions, endeavored to withdraw their attention.

"Oh yes, I recollect you perfectly," Robin at length found breath to say. "I was only wondering whether, now that I am married, you would remember me."

Each spoke with hidden meaning.

"Remember you!" exclaimed Jack; "is it at all likely I could forget?"

It had just come to him that he was still holding her hand; turning to Mr. Blunt, who sat completely mystified, he said, "Why, I have known her since she was so high, and ran about in pinafores—her father was one of my greatest friends." And then, smiling as if the thought amused him, he added, "How shall I bring myself to call her anything but Robin, I wonder? and I shan't know she is speaking to me, so accustomed was I to hear her call me Jack."

"It's one of the most extraordinary things I ever heard of in my life," said Mr. Blunt, remembering that he had heard some very fishy reports about the Squire; and if he was mixed up with Veriker he hadn't a doubt but they were true.

"It certainly is an odd coincidence," said Mrs. Temple, considering herself appealed to; "isn't it, Georgy?"

But Georgy, seemingly not one whit interested in the matter, was attentively examining a picture.

"Isn't it odd, Georgy?" repeated her mother. "Don't you think so?"

"No; if you ask me I really don't see anything very odd in it. The odd thing to me is," and she looked pointedly at Jack, "that being in the same place, Mrs. Blunt and Mr. Dorian-Chandos should not have met before."

"Can she have seen them, or has he told her?" thought Christopher.

His face seemed to betray the suspicion, for Georgy in her turn wondered, "Does he know?" and then, following the eyes of husband and wife, she fancied

they exchanged a look of meaning, and the supposition gave a more favorable turn to the opinion she had formed of Robin.

"And if I had kept to my original intention of going away, we might not have met now," was Jack's answer.

He was not going to be put out of countenance by Miss Georgy; still, he had no wish just then to enter upon an encounter with her; and to avoid it he turned to Mr. Blunt, and little guessing how sharp were the thorns he stuck, began a conversation in praise of Mr. Veriker.

Robin had to entertain Mrs. Temple, Georgy occupied herself with Christopher; the three couple talked separately and a little apart from each other.

Several times Georgy made a movement to go, but her mother, delighted at the chance of pouring her misfortunes into the ear of a new listener, paid no attention to signs given. Jack seemed equally blind; his whole attention was centred on making himself agreeable to Mr. Blunt. And so successful was he that at parting the old man begged him not to think any more of that little affair about the thicket land; he was only very sorry that they hadn't known each other then as they did now.

"And you'll come again," he said heartily. "Pay us another visit soon."

Jack declared that he should be delighted.

"I was hoping," and he tried to catch Robin's ear, "that Mrs. Blunt would ask me."

"Oh, you were waiting for that were you?"

Mr. Blunt laughed amusedly, calling out to Robin:

"Come over here, my dear: tell Mr. Chandos how pleased we shall be to see him whenever he feels inclined to drop in."

Robin seemed to be struck with sudden shyness.

"Oh, but uncle, it is for you to say that. I am not mistress here."

"Yes, yes, you are," said the old man encouragingly, "so long as I'm left master you shall be left missis. Can't say fairer than that, can I, Squire?"

"Certainly not: Then I may come?"—Jack was still addressing Robin—"may I."

"Yes, if you like to, you may;" and she lifted her eyes, and for the first time looked at him, and Jack felt the look had made them friends again. Perhaps Robin felt it too, for she gave a little rippling laugh. "I shall be very glad to see you," she said, "and so will Christopher too."

"Ah, yes; we mustn't forget Christopher!" exclaimed Mr. Blunt loudly.

"That goes without saying," put in Georgy Temple, who came up behind them. "I feel assured that my cousin finds it impossible that he should ever forget Mr. Christopher Blunt."

"What the——"

There was just time for Jack's face to ask the question. Already Mrs. Temple was engrossing the father and son's attention; Georgy had turned towards the door; Robin was saying 'Good-bye' to her. A minute or more after, they had left the house.

If anyone, to whom Jack felt bound to give an answer, had asked him why he had returned to Wadpole, he could not positively have satisfied him. He had come back because he could not stay away—that was how it seemed to him; come back, beckoned by an irresistible desire which he had silently combated with until of a sudden his strength had failed him, the temptation had overcome, and he was journeying home, seeking for reasons to give to others without striving to find any to give to himself.

His first step was to go to the rectory to see the Temples, and this had led to the arrangements in prospect of the visit which they had just paid.

The clang of the gates as they went out seemed to bring him back to his more sober senses. Up to the present time he had been occupied in what he meant to do; one thought had had possession of his mind: he must see Robin. Well! he had seen her; they had met; they had parted. What did he mean to do now?

Aunt Temple was dribbling out discontent about the luxury of such *persons'* surroundings; Georgy was walking along silently—evidently her humor was not a happy one. To the admiration bestowed by her mother on Robin she said nothing, but each remark Jack made was met by a snub or a sneer.

"Well, thank goodness, it's over," she said, answering an appeal made to her. "We've done our duty, and we've paid our call, and there's an end to it so far as we're concerned for a very long time to come."

"They'll be calling on us. That's the next thing," said Mrs. Temple aggrievedly.

"And if they do, there'll be no need to see them. We can say we're not at home."

"Neighborly!" said Jack sarcastically.

"But Jack, only remember what our drawing-room always is to look at," and its recollection made Mrs. Temple sigh dismally. "I don't mind with people who know us—of our own set—but these purse-proud newcomers—oh! it's terribly humiliating, it really is!"

"Rubbish! stuff! nonsense!"

Jack grew quite energetic.

"Who do you suppose looks at the room so long as those they come to see are in it? I can answer for it that Mrs. Blunt won't. She has never been used to a lot of grand surroundings."

"How very strange your knowing her so well before!" Mrs. Temple began digressively. "Of course that'll make a great difference in her to me, and to us all; won't it, Georgy?" Georgy didn't reply. "How surprised you must have been to see her, Jack; weren't you?"

"Oh, I don't know. Not very. People I have met are always turning up somewhere. After all, the world is a very small one."

"Well, yes, I suppose it is. So many people go round it now. In my day it used to be thought wonderful—quite out of the common. I remember a cousin of General White's—not the General White that

lives at Forder—but that man, don't you know who——"

Mrs. Temple came to a sudden stop. The cross-road reached, Jack had turned to Georgy saying:

"Do you want to go straight home?"

"Not particularly. Why?"

"Do you mind, Aunt Temple, if, instead of the fields, Georgy and I go back round by the common, home?"

Feeling that all these walks must in time lead to the church, Mrs. Temple, swallowing the interruption which anyone less favored would have resented, raised no objection. At the stile she took her leave of them, while they, getting over it, walked along the lane, the broader part of which skirted the thicket.

"That's your late bone of contention, isn't it?" said Georgy, following the direction of Jack's eyes, which were fixed on the wooded slopes below.

"Yes," he said, without looking round at her.

"The place where we have spent many a happy hour years ago, when we were boy and girl together. I think you've forgotten all about those times, Jack now."

"On the contrary," he said; "I don't think I ever valued them so much, nor you either, Georgy"—he had taken hold of her hand, and was looking with that wonderfully expressive face of his, which in every appeal he made seemed to carry it at once irresistibly—"so you mustn't forsake me."

"It will be your own fault if I do," she said seriously.

"My own fault, will it? How so?"

"Because you won't trust me."

Jack's eyes regarded her inquiringly. He was wondering how much she knew, or was it only a guess she was making? Anyway, he felt inclined to confide in her. Jack was suffering from that sickening despair which comes over most of us at sight of the plans, hopes, wishes, planted out by ourselves, uprooted by another's

hand. Life seemed suddenly robbed of all its brightness. He had just had his first sight of what some see early—he had looked at "happiness through another's eyes." All his future seemed stranded. There was nothing for him to do—nothing for him to care for. Unknown to himself, he was filled with a craving for sympathy, and the chord was vibrating under the touch of Georgy.

"Well," she said, meeting his eyes fearlessly, "are you afraid to do so?"

"No; only first promise to do me a favor."

She nodded her head in assent.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Be kind to that girl we have just left—for my sake—will you? You don't know what a terrible disappointment I have had about her."

He had let go her hand, and was looking straight in front of him away from her.

"She was the girl you were intending to marry, wasn't she?"

Georgy was trying to help him out with his story.

"Did you guess that? Well, only on Saturday, when I parted with you to go into Wadpole, I was as certain of making her my wife as I am now that she belongs to another man. Going into the wood there—because I was thinking so much about her and about old times—we met, and I had to learn that she was married already."

The face Jack turned to Georgy said more than any words of his could convey.

"Poor fellow!" she murmured involuntarily, and for a minute they walked on silently.

"Then had she deceived you, Jack?" she began.

"Deceived me!" and he laughed bitterly. "No; she has no more thought that I care for her in that way than—that I care for you. Oh, Georgy! you women are most unaccountable beings; a man may expend all the devotion he can upon you, but unless you hear him say in plain words, 'I love you; do you love me?' it all counts for nothing."

"Yes; but you forget what awful mistakes we might make if we went about judging by mere actions. Do you mean that you never spoke to her, then?"

"Never a word. I had known her from such a mere child that, positively, until we had to part I hadn't realized what she was to me; and then, you know, I hadn't anything to offer her. It was on that account that I wrote to Clarkson, as I told you."

"I thought you said a friend had advised you?"

"Yes; and that friend was her father. It was the first time he ever spoke to me of his threatened danger; that led him to speak of his past life, and to give what turned out very good advice to me; and in my turn I begged him to write to these people, who, he said, could give a shelter to his daughter. He did so, the young man came out, and the result of the visit you see."

"But didn't you ever write to them? didn't she ever write to you?"

"I heard from the father once or twice, and then he wrote to say they were going away from Venice. Oh! I feel sure it was meant to deceive me, for there wasn't a word of this young man, and hardly a mention of Robin."

"And she never wrote herself; hadn't she been used to writing to you?"

"Yes; formerly she had, but then—well—I—oh! I didn't feel inclined myself to write in the usual way, and after what had passed I thought I saw why she didn't either."

Georgy waited, wondering what she had best say; with the gauge she possessed of a woman's nature, this silence on the part of Robin was a test of love.

"Don't you think," she said, "that she must have suspected that you cared for her?"

"No—now I don't believe that the thought could have ever entered her head. When we met down there, it was delight at seeing an old friend that she showed me; she was in raptures to think we were going

to live near each other; and I—I wanted never to see her again, to go to the farther end of the world, to put all the space I could between us—it was that feeling which sent me away."

"And what has brought you back?"

Jack felt himself suddenly pulled up short. "Oh—oh!" he stammered "of course I soon got over that; a few hours in the train brought me to my senses, and showed me that I couldn't throw everything to the winds in that wild fashion. I have duties here, and other people to think of—oh, it would never have done to go away! No, I must get over it as best I can; live it down; accustom myself to meet her. It would be very different if there was any feeling on her side, you know; then in honor I should be bound not to return."

"I think you would have been much wiser to stay away," said Georgy, firmly, "at least for a time; I thought she seemed very ill at ease in your presence."

"That was because we had seen each other before, and nobody else knew of it."

"Wait, wait," said Georgy; "now I am going to make my confession."

And to Jack's astonishment, she told him how, standing there—pointing back to the tree—she had overlooked them, and that the suspicions it had raised were her reasons for treating Robin so coldly.

"But that is past now," said Jack, "and you'll try and like her, won't you? You can't help it, when you know her. Be a sister to her, Georgy, do."

"Are you intending to be her brother, then? No; don't look so frightened; I don't mean anything, I don't mean anything, I assure you. I promise to remember that the Squires of Wadpole have always been bachelors."

CHAPTER XXX.

JACK'S influence had a marked effect on his neighbors—people readily follow the lead of a good-looking, well-to-do bachelor. In most of the houses about Wadpole there were sons to push on, daughters to marry, or some sufficient reason for making it desirable to stand well in the good graces of the new Squire, who, before a month had gone by, had strained a great many points to call on everybody worth knowing far and near. When Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Blunt were discussed—as discussed they were certain to be—Jack seized the opportunity of speaking of his former intimacy with Mrs. Blunt, that he had met a friend in her, and that her father, Aston Veriker, and he, while abroad, had seen an immense deal of one another.

Veriker! Was Mrs. Blunt a Miss Veriker then? Oh, really! what, one of the Portsdown Verikers? Then, of course they must call; certainly, there could be no possible reason for not knowing her. And gradually in a very short time it seemed agreed, and by tacit consent, that Mrs. Blunt and her husband Mr. Christopher Blunt, were to be recognized as members of Wadpole society.

Wishing it to be thoroughly understood—more especially in the presence of the man so many of them up to now had ignored—that it was Mrs. Blunt who possessed the "open sesame" to their intimacy, the callers each one repeated something said to them by the Squire.

Mr. Dorian Chandos had spoken of Mrs. Blunt as being such a great friend of his, or Mr. Dorian-Chandos had seemed to speak with such regret of Mrs. Blunt's father; he said while they were abroad they were so very much together.

Honey to Robin, gall to old Blunt, who endured martyrdom in having to sit still and hear these praises given of the man whom, even dead, above all others he hated.

Rankling within him, they began to breed dislike of Robin. Instead of being beholden to him, the feeling forced on him was that he was being patronized because of her, was being taken by the hand for the reason that his son—*his* son—was married to the daughter of that Veriker. Faugh! the very thought brought out the perspiration on Mr. Blunt's ample forehead. If he could only tell them, could only speak the things he knew, about that swindling, card-sharping vagabond. And the Squire!—Mr. Blunt's slightly rubicund nose twitched; he smelt a rat somewhere there. No man, let him be blind as a bat, or green as a gooseberry—and the Squire was neither the one nor the other—could be long without taking the measure of Veriker. He'd find out in what sort of company Robin and her father had found this Mr. Dorian-Chandos, and how it was they came to be so thick together, they and he. You were never the worse positioned for having a thumb to place down on a man in any case of emergency. Mr. Chandos was all very well in his way; he could make himself very agreeable, and he was the Squire; but there the matter ended.

Since that first day of introduction, so far as Mr. Blunt was concerned, he had never managed to push the intimacy further. Not that that surprised him very much, nor annoyed him either; he had sense enough to know that they were men whom age and bringing-up in two totally opposite worlds prevented having much in common together. But what did irritate him was, Mr. Dorian-Chandos's manifest avoidance of Christopher: an indescribable something—which, without being in any way able to account for—obliged him to see that the two were never perfectly at ease with one another. It was true Mr. Chandos called frequently, often under the pretext of a very flimsy necessity; but any step beyond mere civility was almost resented in his manner, and every offer of hospitality was unhesitatingly declined.

Gradually and very unwillingly it began to dawn upon Mr. Blunt's mind that Robin was the object of all this attention, not only on the part of Mr. Chandos, but of everyone else in and about Wadpole ; and that so long as they could secure Robin's society, Christopher and he might go whistle.

There were moments when these thoughts filled Mr. Blunt with such fury that to guard himself against them he had to seek some distraction. This then was what he had toiled for, made his money for—why he had bought an estate and surrounded himself with luxury, that the daughter of that swindler might have the benefit of it—that she might go driving about the country belaced and befurbelowed, hand and glove with the best ; not for the reason of being *his* son's wife, but because, forsooth, she was the daughter of *Mr. Aston Veriker !* Mr. Blunt's veins stood out, his pulses beat, his heart thudded until he grew nervous at the force of his own passion ; and to calm it he would have recourse to a remedy, any over-indulgence in which, while it made him more at ease in himself, rendered him twenty times more obnoxious to those around him.

He would waylay Christopher ; contradict, thwart, argue with Robin, and grow furious because in each dispute the husband would side with the wife. Every now and then he would make a fresh attempt at stirring Christopher up to what he seemed blind to. Why did he permit Robin to go alone out riding and driving, to these parties, to luncheons, and afternoon teas ? hadn't they asked him ?

"Certainly he had been asked," Christopher would say.

"Then why don't you go ? You've learnt to drive and to ride—you know how to play all these games · what do you stop at home for !"

"Because I prefer to stop at home."

"Oh, prefer ! Ah yes, that's it. Well then, I can tell you what : if you stop at home she ought to stop too."

"Not at all, if it pleases her to go."

"Pleases her to go! A wife's business is to be pleased to do what her husband does, and not to be seen all over the place with this one and the other, and you don't know who."

"I am perfectly satisfied; I always know with whom Robin has been."

Alas, poor Christopher! he only knew it too well. Jealousy is love's shadow, and he had not been many times in presence of Jack with Robin without knowing on whom that shadow had fallen.

Christopher held an index to most of Jack's movements. He could have told where they would meet him, why he would not stay, where he would not go. In a room he began to count how long it would be before Jack would find himself at Robin's side, and he had blushed at the anxiety with which he had sought in the dictionary for some sentence in Italian which Jack had spoken to her.

Then the sight of her face, radiant and happy, sent a chill through Christopher's heart. It was the Robin he had seen in Venice—until the last month she had never looked like that since they were married.

The bursts of song which every now and then came from her as from a bird, jarred on the ears that had known her dumb until this presence came to make that melody.

Oh, cruel, cruel Love! what tortures lie within thy quiver! Strive as he would, Christopher could not help holding Jack as the mirror by which he saw reflected all Robin's actions. When he stayed at home —not wishing to give his weakness food by watching them—Robin, as soon as they were alone—for a sort of dumb resentment had sprung up between her and Mr. Blunt, which kept her silent before him—would talk of all that had happened; tell him of what this one had said—had done; of herself; of Jack. So far, nothing was hidden—of that Christopher felt sure, and his surmise was correct; Robin lived a joyous being,

with no thought as yet that the atmosphere which had turned all to brightness was the atmosphere of love.

Happiness in many cases serves as the hole into which the ostrich puts its head.

Robin never stopped to consider what people said, what they thought, what remarks they might make upon her—she had never been trained in the wholesome fear of Mrs. Grundy; and Jack, having yielded to temptation, was now growing reckless, leaning all his might on that treacherous reed which he called honor, and stultifying himself by the oft-repeated assurance that they were nothing more than the friends they had been formerly.

How dangerous for most, so placed, is that constant recurrence to days gone by, those roused memories of things that others know not of—a glance exchanged, a sigh echoed, a word interpreted! All these passed between Jack and Robin, and each time they met, the communion grew more dangerously dear.

Georgy Temple, who now saw a great deal of Robin, had more than once given Jack a word of warning, by repeating to him some remark that she had heard made; but Jack only treated what she said with contempt, betraying at the same time a little vexation with her for telling him. "If they hadn't us to talk of," he said, "they'd find something to say about other people. I only know that it is quite impossible that they should have less occasion. Of course they don't know how intimately we've been connected, and as I don't consider it's any business of theirs, I shall not enlighten them."

Georgy felt it impossible to say more, but she nevertheless remained watchful, and when certain gossips were present made very open demands on Jack's attention.

One afternoon after a little display of this sort, as she and Mr. Cameron were walking back from a tennis-party together, some conversation between them led to his naïvely confessing, what an unaccountable

feeling of distress this seeing her cousin's attentions gave him.

"I have no experience of ever having had anything quite like the same feeling before," he said candidly.

"Is it because you dislike Jack?" asked Georgy.

"No."

Mr. Cameron was afraid not. He stammered out something about a too idle life having demoralized him, so that since he had come to Wadpole he was grown selfish.

"Selfish are you? in what way?"

Mr. Cameron hesitated, looked at Georgy, looked away from her, and then with a half-penitent air he said:

"Well, for one thing because I always want to monopolize you, which certainly I have no right to do; but," he went on earnestly, "I assure you that of late, if I see anyone else near you, more particularly Mr. Chandos, I am so angry and miserable that I feel I ought to be ashamed of myself."

"Ought to be! then you are not?"

"No, not in the least: it's with you that I feel so furious, and—the other one whoever it may be."

Georgy laughed, amusedly.

"It's a funny state of affairs, isn't it?" he continued; "can you account for it in any way?"

"I!" and she opened her eyes in amazement; "no. How should I? what makes you ask me?"

"Oh, because I thought perhaps you might know—people say women think about love a great deal more than men do."

"Love! what has love got to do with it?"

"That's just what I want to know; because I feel that if I have fallen in love with you, Georgy, it's very foolish in me, isn't it?"

"Very foolish indeed," she said seriously.

"You think so?"

"I feel sure of it."

"Ah, yes. I was afraid you would."

"I haven't the slightest doubt," she went on in the same voice; and I certainly ought to know, since I suffer from the same complaint."

The pained look in his face had put an end to the teasing she had meant to keep up with him.

"Georgy," he said reproachfully, looking round; then, meeting her eyes filled with far more tenderness than half those that knew her gave her credit for, the truth seemed to dawn upon him.

"No, no!" she said, putting up her hands; "you can't embrace me on the public road. Don't look at me like that."

"Like what? did I mean to? I don't think I did—I don't know. Georgy, tell me—put in into words—say you really love me."

"What, before you have told me that you love *me!* I'm sure I shan't."

"But you know that I love you."

"No, I don't."

"But I tell you that I do."

"Well, then, I tell you that I do."

"Really, truly, positively, love me."

"Really, truly, positively, love you—there!"

"Oh, you can't, Georgy; it is impossible."

"Ah, so I have told myself, hundreds of times," and she sighed lugubriously; "but the fact remains the same. It's horribly foolish in us, you know, two people circumstanced as we are—I without a penny to bless myself, and you with never a shilling to call your own."

Mr. Cameron laughed delightedly.

"What shall we do?" he said, rubbing his hands together. "We must make a beginning somehow. Oh, we shall get on bravely after we once see the direction to start in. Let me think, now. The first thing to do is to tell your father. To-morrow morning, before I go to the schools, I shall run up and ask to speak to him."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Georgy deci-

sively—"not yet," she added, seeing his look of dismay. "First of all, let me speak to him; and after that, about telling any one else just yet, we'll see."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE antagonism which steadily, day by day, increased between Robin and Mr. Blunt, was not—Christopher was obliged to own—solely the fault of his father.

A change had come to Robin's temper, and she who had been accustomed to make sunshine everywhere, was now irritable, captious, and almost seeking causes for offence.

On two or three occasions Christopher, gently indicating her fault, had tried to remonstrate with her; but instead of more than meeting him half way, as up to now she had always done, she resented his interference with sharp words or sullen silence.

Then her moods were so variable, it was impossible to count on them: at times shutting herself in her own room, seeking to be alone—hardly answering if spoken to; at times fatiguing one with a flow of spirits unnaturally high, and painfully reminding Christopher of the mad reckless gaiety which he had so deplored in her father.

What had come to her? What had so changed her?

He who asked that question did not wait for a reply; but a name that he tried to forget rang in his ears, and in spite of himself, pursued him.

"Haven't you anything to talk about, Christopher?" Robin would say, forgetting that it was she who had always made conversation. Of late, when they found themselves together a restraint seemed to have fallen on them, and neither could think of anything which would interest the other.

The time had gone by when Robin poured out all she had seen and done and said, in a volume of inno-

cent chatter. Now, she went out and came back, saw people at home and abroad, without—beyond the fact that she had done so—Christopher being any the wiser.

"What is the good of telling him," she would say, "when he doesn't seem to care?" And all the while a voice within gave the lie to that thought; and struggling with the desire to be frank, and a true embarrassment of finding words to say, she would grow angry with Christopher for not asking questions that would force her confidence.

So far, not a word that might not answer to friendship had ever been exchanged between Jack and Robin; but by degrees, easy and unseen, they had passed from the stage of being open and free to the stage of being watchful and guarded—not watchful of others, they felt far too secure for that to occur to them—but each kept a hold on senses that would not always answer to control.

Little did Christopher dream that more than once Robin had returned home full of the determination to tell him—she did not know what—except to say that she felt wretched, miserable, and that he must help her; and coming in she had found him seated with his father, reading to him, talking with him, and, as it seemed, hardly noticing her. And the poor heart, bruised with stumbling, tender, and easily set smarting, would grow faint, because the voice of that tempter, who never missed an occasion, told her, "He does not want you; he gets on very well without you."

Had he ceased then to care for her—did he no longer love her? Oh, sorrowful tears! that flowed over hopes that were shattered—two lives that were divided!

As a beam in the hand of a giant, misunderstanding comes to widen the breach between those who love. Thus Christopher, equally sore at the neglect he suffered under, winced, because, after having been absent for hours, Robin still stayed away, avoiding his com-

pany. Did she think that it was pleasure to sit with his father? striving to cheat the old man out of his ill-humor, so that he might be better dispositioned to show them generosity.

The question of that separate income—more than ever of late—had seldom been away from Christopher's mind, but each attempt to name it had been met with increasing rebuffs.

"You've all you want, and whatever you wish for you can have; and if that don't satisfy you, I don't see what will."

"But it's usual, father," Christopher would urge, "when a man hasn't a profession, and is married, that he has something independent given to him."

"Who says it's usual?"

"Oh, I don't know who."

"No, nor I either. I'll tell you, though, what isn't usual—for a man to give the fling of his house to a parcel of people who are above putting their legs with him under the same table."

"How do you mean? I don't see what that's got to do with it."

"No—nor I don't mean that you shall, neither; which you would be mighty likely to do, if that young lady upstairs got the chance of a house of her own to rule the roast over. Ah, I have never made a greater mistake in my life than in letting you go off there; I might have known no good would come of it. There now, don't begin! I ain't going to say a word against *her;* only she's got the name of Veriker, and a tame bird can't come out of a wild egg."

"It's rather late in the day to be thinking of that now," Christopher would answer gloomily. And the old man would tell him that none knew that better than he did himself; but he wasn't going to make a bad matter worse by letting the reins go from out his hands altogether.

"When it's a child to provide for," he said, "you won't find me say nay; but so long as you're only the

two together, as things have always been so let them stay."

And for that time, at least, Christopher would have to give up the discussion; but he by no means abandoned it; his love for Robin made him daily more alive to the necessity of seeing her provided for, so that, happen what might, she would never be left wholly dependent on his father.

Mr. Blunt, seeing his resolve so fixed, was equally firm in the opposite direction; and without any open warfare, Robin became the unacknowledged bone of contention between them. Everything she said irritated her father-in-law; everything she did annoyed him; they could not be left together for five minutes, but an offence had been taken or given—ofttimes of a nature which, while it stung her to the quick, she could not repeat to Christopher, or even allude to its meaning, while he, good fellow, only getting a garbled account, would feel but the greater pain at Robin's lack of forbearance.

Thus gradually the house was being sapped of domestic harmony, an undercurrent of discord was set flowing; and with the gladness of a bird who finds again its liberty, did Robin continue to count on the meetings which Jack was always proposing.

People began to exchange meaning looks, and have their own little particular jokes about the great attention paid to Mrs. Christopher Blunt by Mr. Dorian-Chandos. The ill-natured shook their heads over it, the better-disposed did not wonder; Mrs. Blunt was really so charming, sang so well and was so good-natured about it, that they felt certain there never could be any harm in her—though it would not be surprising if there was when one thought of a sweet young lady like that, belonging to a good old family, too, being condemned to pass her life with that silent, stupid young Christopher Blunt and his atrociously vulgar father.

There was one fact that was universally condemned

as a pity, and that was that Georgy Temple allowed her designs to be so apparent. She positively forced herself on the Squire, there was no shutting your eyes to that; and two or three times he had, as well as a man could, decidedly rebuffed her.

Mrs. Temple, too, seemed to take the thing for granted; she had spoken to several friends about what an excellent thing it would be for Dora and the whole family. It was such a terrible mistake, because you happened to be related to a man, to suppose you had a positive right to him; and in their opinion the Squire wished them to see it, and to show them that Mrs. Blunt was an old friend, too—though nobody could forget that while Georgy Temple was there to tell them. She was forever harping on how very intimate they two had been in bygone days together, as if that would prevent your seeing how jealous she was of them now.

All these different motives, real and supposed, gave quite an impulse to Wadpole society; and the weather being fine, and the days long, parties and picnics followed one on the other. To some of these Christopher went, from some he stayed away; and when he did so, Robin and the Temples most frequently went together.

* * * * * * *

"Without my seeing much of him, Jack manages to favor us with a good deal of his society," the rector said to Georgy, as, the day following her explanation with Mr. Cameron, she volunteered her company for a walk to Uplands with her father.

The conversation had turned on some of the previous parties, and Georgy was laughingly repeating a few of the remarks she had heard made upon her.

"It fails me to think what mother will say when she finds that Jack and I are not engaged to each other," she said, altering her voice, and looking at him fixedly.

"And you are not?"

"No."

"Not going to be?"

"Never."

The word came very decidedly.

"Ah!" and he gave a deep-drawn breath. "Well, then, it being settled that it is not for your sake that he is always to be found dangling about in women's company, I think the sooner Mr. Jack makes himself for a time scarce in Wadpole, the better." Sitting quietly by, engrossed in the cleaning of his guns, the arrangement of his flies, the putting in order of his fishing-tackle—for the privacy of a room had been a luxury so long done without, that he had ceased to feel the necessity of it—the rector noted many things which were believed to escape his observation. "What do you say—eh?"

"Say I wish you'd tell him so, father."

Georgy felt as if nothing could be easier.

"I tell him? not I, my dear;" then observing the expression on her face, he added in explanation, "There are some things in which men never interfere one with the other."

"Not men, perhaps—but you're a clergyman, father; clergymen say many things—"

"About which, if they are anything of my sort, they had better hold their tongues; it doesn't do, my dear, to assume no other duty than that of pulling up all the black sheep you may meet straying."

Georgy looked troubled; it gave her inexpressible pain to hear her father speak in that way; she always felt that if something—she could not tell what—could have been altered, what a different man he might have been!

"We'll ask Cameron," he said, patting her arm quietly; "he'll find something to say to him, I dare say, if you think that's what is needed."

"You think well of Cameron, father—you like him, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," and the rector made a show of swallow-

ing something; "I'm doing my best. Seeing I am likely to get him given to me as a son-in-law, I suppose it's right to try and make the effort."

Georgy's face turned crimson for a moment; she was completely worsted by confusion.

"W—what do you mean?" she stammered; and then she burst out with, "That mean, deceitful little wretch! I do believe after all he has been saying something to you; has he? has he said anything to you about me?"

The rector shook his head.

"No," he said; "but he has been saying something *to* you, I see."

"Oh, well, really, papa, I believe I first put it into his head."

"Your sex generally do, my dear."

"No; but I mean I thought of it first."

"I am even prepared to credit that, too."

"No, but joking apart, he couldn't believe it was possible. I saw that."

"And you helped him to a solution of his difficulty."

"Well, you know, when two people are of one mind, it makes things easier, doesn't it?"

"If they happen to be of one household, certainly it does."

"Oh, that makes me think of mother. How shall we tell her? what will she say?"

"Say it's my fault, that's certain, for wanting a curate to help me."

"So she will; I never thought of that."

"Nor of a good many other things, I dare say. Did it happen to occur to either of you how you were going to live?"

"It occurred to me very forcibly," said Georgy dolefully. "All the same, papa," and the bright fearless eyes looked at him steadily, "I have made my choice, so you must forgive me."

"Forgive you, child!" and laying his hands on her shoulders, he wheeled her round, and for a moment

stood silently regarding her. "And so you thought I had not seen anything of what was going on," he said presently, "that you were bamboozling your stupid old mole of a father, did you?"

"Oh, it wasn't that I meant to keep it secret from *you*—only—well—oh, I can't explain it quite, you know."

"Can't you?" he said; and then, with an odd quiver in his voice, he added: "I suppose it never entered into your young head that once upon a time—long, long ago—I was in love too. Yes, Georgy, the same voice you hear spoke to me; to one—not so very unlike you—I then told the same old story. They are all green memories still within me, and the recollection of them makes me tender to you."

Georgy slid her arm through his—she took his hand into her own—and silently they walked on together without another word or question, for something seemed to tell the girl that it was not of her mother that her father was speaking.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BEFORE startling all Wadpole with the news of her engagement, Georgy Temple's desire was to get Jack out of the way. "I shall speak to him plainly," she said, talking the matter over to herself, "tell him that I don't consider he is acting fairly about Mrs. Blunt, and ask him what he really intends to do?" and managing to secure Jack's company to herself that evening, she adroitly led up to the subject, so that finally she was able to put these questions to him.

As she foresaw, Jack was more than ever furious; but the temper he showed was not the temper she feared. He gave vent to too many invectives against fate, himself, and those by whom he was surrounded, to make his anger very dangerous.

In truth, much that Georgy said were but echoes of

thoughts, the conflict of which had of late by turns threatened to save Jack and to sink him.

Walking in this Paradise of content, Robin had as yet but rarely caught sight of the tree on which hung the apple of temptation; but for Jack its fruit had been plucked too often for his eyes not to be fully open to the danger he was running.

Each time he left Robin he made a resolve that the next should be the last time of meeting, and the tedium of separation was often beguiled by the plans he was busy in projecting.

He would go; he didn't care where, nor what became of him. Life, as far as he was concerned, was not worth considering. It was for her and on her account alone he made the sacrifice, and who could tell what it cost him! Would she guess? would she ever dream of the suffering he had undergone to leave her fair name untarnished?

The tempter's best moment is chosen when—the battle with self over, the victory, as we think, won—we sink down weary and spiritless; then, unnoticed, an insidious allurement creeps in where a bold assault would have been resisted.

It was thus that into Jack's mind came the desire for a farewell meeting to gain an opportunity of giving Robin some slight inkling of why he was going away. Surely the small indulgence of seeing her alone for the last time might be permitted him. Stern censor as he now held himself to be, that need not be denied; to say "no" was flinging a doubt on his resolution.

But to accomplish this meeting—there lay the difficulty—how was it to be managed? Never since that first time in the thicket had the two been positively alone together. If they were walking, somebody else was walking at their heels; if riding, a third always bore them company; and in rooms—Robin singled out by the men, Jack a little run after by the women—it was only by a whispered word, a meaning look, the pressure of a hand, they conveyed to each other their

mutual sympathy. Certainly opportunities had occurred when together they might have strayed away, but it was the most certain proof of Jack's sense of danger that he had invariably avoided such conditions, ofttimes to Robin's surprise and unacknowledged disappointment. She was therefore a trifle startled when, some few days after his conversation with Georgy—managing during an afternoon at the rectory to get near her—he said, lowering his voice so that it should not reach the ears of those near them:

"Do you never go to the thicket now, in the morning?"

She shook her head.

"I have never been there since that day," and the eyes momentarily raised to his were drooped again.

For a minute neither spoke; Jack was arranging in his mind the desired meeting. Robin's heart was beating so fast that it frightened her. Only that morning, some trifle that had occurred had seemed suddenly and for the first time to ask, Whither was all this leading? And Robin, flinging herself down by the side of the bed, near which she stood, had given way to an uncontrollable fit of weeping, the cause of which she did not seek to define; but her manner at breakfast that morning was softened almost to penitence to Christopher, and Mr. Blunt's surly fault-finding was allowed to pass unnoticed.

There is a compunction which does not shape itself in words, because, perhaps, the sins which have caused it have dwelt but in thought and feeling.

Without asking herself the cause, Robin had come to the resolve that she would stay at home more, not leave Christopher so much as of late she had been doing; and she had even reached the length of saying to him that she fancied that he was not looking well—what did he think of a little change of air?

Clutching at the thought, the only way to hide his joy was to assume indifference.

Oh, he didn't know—he didn't care. Well, yes;—perhaps, if it pleased her—some day.

Pleased her! Robin swallowed down the sigh, and quickly changed the subject; even to herself, she refused to own how much that proposition had cost her.

All that day her emotions continued high-pitched, her nerves over-strung. She would not have kept her engagement, only that it was to the rectory, an afternoon-party, and Mr. Blunt was going as well as Christopher.

Jack had had the forethought to count on this party. On any occasion of festivity at the rectory, every domestic arrangement was in the most inextricable state of muddle. No one in the house had any head but Georgy; and she was here, there, and everywhere, with such unflagging energy, that Mrs. Temple usually felt it incumbent on her to apologize for her daughter. It had become such a want, she said, in the present day, repose of manner.

Mr. Blunt, to whom she happened to say this, too much on his good behavior to contradict her, said:

"It was a pity, though, that it should be." But feeling, hot and thirsty as he was, that he could better put up with want of repose than with the want of a good cup of tea, which Georgy was hastening to bring him, he addressed Mrs. Temple, in his heart, as a stiff-necked canting old Jezebel, who wasn't worth being named on the same day as her straightforward good-looking daughter. "And she's a lady, too," he added, following up his meditation, "every inch of her, no matter what she's up to, or what she has on; and I wish I had got her for a daughter-in-law. You'd have to keep the whole bunch o' them in the bargain, but better so than that one;" and his eyes fell scowlingly on Robin, standing a little apart with Jack near her, while Georgy engrossed the attention of Mr. Cameron and Christopher.

The familiar contact into which the three were brought had obliged the curate to divulge his secret to his friend—for such Christopher had become—and

then, growing uneasy at having told him, he felt compelled to confess what he had done to Georgy, and then to run away, so that, without him, they might make it all right together. Of course he had to be brought back to be duly admonished and interceded for; and then Georgy, giving it as her opinion that the various refreshments had got into his head, remained very much on the alert with him to make sure that he committed no further indiscretions. This, added to her other duties, withdrew much of her attention from Jack, who, as he had foreseen, found more than usual opportunities for speaking to Robin.

He had quite decided upon leaving Wadpole; and this meeting he wanted to arrange in the thicket was to be a farewell interview, where, safe from observation and interruption, he might tell her that he was going away, and let her perhaps guess at the cause. Why not? It could not harm her to know that he cared for her—had always cared for her—his love fed by the thought that she had in return given her heart to him.

Of late Jack's assurance had terribly failed him, and he began to think it possible that, after all, Robin perhaps had never counted him as anything but a friend; and the memories that rose up in contradiction had goaded him on to make a final trial, so that at least he might carry with him some crumb of consolation, no matter how small it might be.

Between people coming and going and chattering with them as they passed by, there was only the opportunity of an occasional sentence, which Jack seized on each time.

"The trees are all out now—it is lovely in the thicket," he said.

"Yes, is it?"

Something in his manner troubled her, gave a sense of consciousness which filled her with embarrassment. Why should not the place look lovely? Why should

he not tell her so? Robin made an effort to speak unconcernedly.

"I must try and go down there some day, soon."

Another interruption, so that ten minutes had gone before Jack asked,

"When will you go? To-morrow afternoon? about three o'clock will you be there?"

He spoke eagerly. Robin's heart beat faster than before.

"Robin! promise me, for the sake of old days, that you'll come. You will, won't you?"

Oh, that voice pleading close to her ear—for Jack had bent his head lower—what memories it brought back! Side by side they were standing on the shores of Lido. They were gazing at the stars, listening to the sea, basking in the sun together—then always together, now!

Jack hardly realized that their eyes had met, before Robin was half-way across the lawn to join a group seated there; and after that, finding he had followed her, she volunteered her services to Georgy, asking if she could be of any use to her; moving about from this place to that, but always avoiding Jack, who, strive as he did, found no opportunity of saying another word to her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THAT afternoon it had been arranged between Christopher and Mr. Cameron that they would spend the next day at Uplands, and soon after breakfast Christopher started to call for his friend. The confidence of the previous day seemed but to draw the two men closer together, and without well knowing how it had been led up to, Christopher found that he was talking of himself, and, a very unusual thing with him, of his own affairs.

He wanted some advice respecting this income he

was asking from his father, and to show reason why a separate allowance was imperative, entailed a relation of some of their domestic difficulties to Mr. Cameron.

Mr. Blunt's ungovernable temper, and its growing violence towards Robin, were sufficient causes to give for the estrangement which of late had separated them; and Christopher felt half the weight vanish as Mr. Cameron severely blamed him for not at once speaking candidly and openly to Robin. The subject once broached, they slid on by degrees to talk of Venice, and of the life they had lived there; and these memories once reached even after the two had separated, Christopher's thoughts were still busy, and he returned home with a lighter spirit and full of courage to speak.

He blamed himself because the night before, when Robin had followed him into the library, as if wanting to talk, he had not encouraged her to stay; but that question of independent means was so before him, more particularly since Robin had suggested that some change might do them good, that Christopher had determined to state his request more forcibly in a letter which he had written that night, and left for his father to peruse while he was away.

Voices!

Christopher had come round by the garden, and was close by the veranda out on to which opened the room where, after luncheon, Robin usually sat. He listened; it was Robin's voice—high-pitched, loud, angry, and mixed with it came a volley of coarse abuse and vituperation, which made him fling open the door. There, purple with rage, sat his father; and before him, erect, defiant stood Robin, her color red, her eyes blazing.

His coming into the room seemed to attract no attention, so engrossed were they with one another.

"Father! Robin!"

Christopher tried to put himself between them; but Robin's strong young arm pushed him away.

"You had better not come here," she said. "He is

your father! and you say you owe him some duty. He is not mine!" and she threw into the words an accent of withering contempt, "and I owe him none."

"You owe me, though, the victuals you eat, and every single stitch of clothes you've got on your back." By way of parenthesis, Mr. Blunt, when angry, borrowed his speech from a not particularly choice vocabulary. "If it wasn't for me, you'd be a pauper—a beggar living on your wits, as your father did before you! Oh, a nice trap the two of you laid, and I, like a fool, swallowed the bait; and now it's a separate house, a separate income—nothing less will content you."

"Father!" exclaimed Christopher.

But the old man shook him off roughly.

"Don't try to stop me," he said; "it's high time she heard some of the things I've been telling her; if she didn't know them before she knows them now. Oh, she's a true daughter of her precious father! Vagabond swindler, I only wish he'd been hanged before he'd written his palavering letter to me!"

Goaded beyond endurance, Robin sprang forward to answer, but Christopher had already caught her by the shoulder.

"It is of no use trying to resist, Robin," he said sternly; "out of this room you must go. It is for me to speak to my father, not you. Try and remember that he is an old man, that his passion has mastered him—anything you like, but stay to contend with him you shall not."

And after another moment of useless struggle, the key was turned in the door, outside which Robin found herself standing motionless, speechless, staring blankly as if stunned. Just then the clock struck one—two—three—three o'clock! A half-smothered cry burst from her lips, and past the window like one possessed she ran out of the house.

Need it be said whither she was flying? There was but one being who would sympathize with her sorrow,

to whom she could tell her trouble ; he was waiting for her, and to him she was going.

"Jack!"

As in the days of old, when she had sobbed out her childish griefs upon his neck, at sight of him her arms opened, only he stayed her by the quick catching of her hands in both of his—a glance had shown him that memory alone prompted this self-abandonment of action.

"Robin, what is it? what is the matter? what has happened to you?"

She had slid down before him, was kneeling on the grass, her head bowed on his hands, her eyes raining tears on them.

It was in vain he tried to raise her.

"Let me be!" she sobbed; "let me stay!"

A rush of tenderness drew Jack to bend down, his lips would press themselves upon that silky head, but ere they touched it he drew back. No—he was too near the verge to venture anything which would at once carry him over ; a quick-caught breath sent the impulse back, and with a face turned pale, his nostrils quivering, his mouth tight-set, he waited for Robin to recover.

The burst of tears loosened the hold of suffering, there was no longer that grip upon her throat; gradually words to say came to her mind, and though her voice was broken and tremulous, she had a better command over her emotions.

"Jack," she said, looking at him fixedly—there was no feeling now that she must avert her eyes from his face—"Jack, I'm going away—going to leave here for ever. No, don't look like that—don't tell me I ought to stay. I can't—I can't! that horrible old man will drive me to kill him if I do. Oh, if you could but know all I've suffered from him since I came—the things he has said to me—the accusations he has brought against me—the vile lies he has dared to speak against my father! He calls him a card-sharper and swindler, and says he laid a trap to catch Christopher to get him

to marry me—that I owe him the food I eat—the clothes I wear—that but for him I should be a beggar."

Between his teeth Jack bestowed on Mr. Blunt some ugly epithets.

"Oh, the cursed fate," he groaned, "that has pursued us both! What made you in such haste, Robin? you might have written, you might have trusted me. When I left you—went away, I could have sworn that you loved me."

"When you went away," she repeated dreamily.

"Yes, from Venice, the last time we parted there; only that I was not worth a sou, do you think I could have left you? Were words needed, Robin, to tell you that I loved you?"

Oh, the wealth of tenderness which Jack threw into that most unmerited reproach! At one sweep the clouds rolled back, and left the past without a shadow.

"You—you did care for me, then?"

Rosy as the dawn the blushing color came creeping into Robin's face.

"Like *that* when we were in Venice together? Oh!"

Words are not given to tell the joy she felt.

"I worshipped you," he said—"worshipped you then as I do now."

* * * * * * * *

"Hush!"

That mad beating of their hearts had almost dulled their ears to sound.

"I heard a noise, I thought; did you?"

There was no danger now of being seen; the trees of leafy June, grown thick and close, shut the whole space from out of view.

For a few moments the two stood listening attentively; all was still—not a sound could they hear. Consciousness had however returned, and with it a sense of danger.

Fixing his eyes on Robin, Jack stood silently looking at her; she, with no thought of the future, was

listening to a wondrous melody, "He loves me—he loves me!"

Ah, how many a woman has gone down in the whirlpool of destruction, with that siren song sounding in her ears.

"You say that you must go away," Jack began hurrying out his words. "How is that possible without friends, alone, without money—by yourself?"

"I thought that you would help me—would lend me some money, I know."

When she had talked of going away her heart had been hot and angry; but Jack loved her—had always loved her. Holding that talisman, what could harm her now?

So opposed is the nature of man and of woman. The words whieh had soothed Robin had been to Jack as burning pitch upon smouldering tow. Carry out his good resolves, do what he had vowed to do? Impossible—impossible!

"Lend you money!" he repeated contemptuously; "is not every penny I possess at your service, to make what use you like of. Of what value is anything to me so long as I have not you to share it?"

Robin took a step back.

"But——" she said.

"But—but, Robin, we have gone too far for 'buts.' An hour ago I had made the resolution to say good-bye to you—to go away—to leave you; now," and his voice trembled, "I shall still go, only you will go with me—you must—you shall!"

She did not speak, but something in her face made him say more pleadingly:

"Would you spoil both our lives? Make mine a burden and a curse to me, because an unforeseen chance drove you into a bondage the gall of which is killing you? Child, think! if I had loved you less I should never have left you. It was the greatest act of self-sacrifice in all my life, and to lose you has been my reward. Must I plead with you, tell you the

misery I have endured, the torture I have suffered? No! Come with me, and life will be paradise. Send me away, and I am lost."

"No, no, Jack, don't say so;" and she pressed her hands against her eyes to drive backthe image that word had conjured up. "I will go with you anywhere, only it must be soon—at once."

"To-night?" he said eagerly.

"To-night."

"You will come?"

"I promise you I will."

Jack carried first one han and then the other to his lips; a little shrinking back on Robin's part warned him not to risk more; besides which, he himself felt the great need of present restraint: the time would soon come—was very near.

They would meet in the same place at a later hour, by which time all preparations would be made to insure their uninterrupted departure.

Had a chill fallen on them both, making them look so grave, and holding their speech in check, so that beyond the necessary interchange about time and place, neither seemed to find anything to say? It was an unacknowledged relief when the fear of observation suggested the necessity of separation, and Jack, now full of prudence, decided that Robin had best return to the house, while he waited there until he felt sure she was well on her way.

The branches which he had held back to let her pass through closed again. He had watched the last glimpse of her departing figure, and now turned to where a cut-down root of a tree stood, against which he leaned, trying to calm down the fierce turmoil of passion, which in one burst had carried away all his late resolutions.

Only that morning, in an interview which he had sought with Georgy Temple, he had told her of the decision he had come to; and made stronger by her out-spoken approval, he had confessed the error he had

made in returning so soon to Wadpole. They had discussed where he should go, and what he should do, and Georgy had promised that during his absence, she would keep him posted up in all the news of the neighborhood.

What would she think now when she learned that Robin had gone with him? He could not tell her that a mere chance, an unforeseen accident, had brought about an event which she would always believe must have been decided on at the very time they were conversing. Georgy's was not a disposition to overlook a deception; he would, he felt, forfeit her friendship for ever. The rector, too, what would he think of it, and other friends he had made in the county among his neighbors? All would blame, all condemn him; and rightly, too, because none knew the real facts of the story. If they did, whatever they might say, they would feel differently.

How strangely inconsistent is human nature! Never before had Jack seemed to value the good opinion of others so highly. Not for worlds would he have acknowledged to himself that he regretted the step he had taken, but a thousand pricks of conscience came to torment him.

A few words—two or three disjointed sentences dropped by Robin—had given him the key to all he had made her sensitive heart suffer; and the thought of that newly-awakened love—shrinking back with shame because of the fear that it had given itself to one by whom it was not wanted—stirred him with a compunction he had never felt before. It was true he had played with her, trifled with her, thinking of his own pleasure, not of her pain.

Was this what he was still doing?

His answer came in the vows he registered to protect her, shield her, devote his whole life in striving to make her happy.

Could he do this?

Suddenly the instinct that some one was near, rather

than any sound he heard, made him look up and turn half round.

It was Christopher standing close to him.

"Have you been here long?" Jack asked.

And supreme as seemed the moment, terrible as was the situation, Christopher could but marvel at the self-command showed in putting the question—no start, no change of countenance betrayed any emotion.

"For some time, behind the brushwood there, I have."

No need to tell that; Jack had but asked to gain time. He saw in Christopher's face that he had been witness to what had passed between him and Robin, and the knowledge made him feel much less at ease than he seemed. Drawing himself up, he stood and with a questioning look waited for Christopher to begin.

How contrary to anything we may conceive are the tragedies of real life usually played out! Accusation, invective, reproach sound natural enough on the stage; but standing face to face—the injured and the injurer—the froth of many words is out of place. So at least it seemed to Christopher. What he had to say needed no prelude to discover his outraged feeling. Indignation, wrath, suffering, what mattered it to the man who had planned to rob him of the one treasure dearer than life? Christopher had to save Robin; that was the thought to be kept before him. Time enough for self when this horrible crisis was past.

"I have heard you ask my wife to leave her home with you," he began; and it even struck Jack how different to his usual way was his manner of speaking. "You tell her you love her, and you seek to ruin her!"

Jack winced internally.

"I loved Robin Veriker," he said, "before you ever saw her."

"And she—did she love you?"

"I was not in a position to ask her then. I was

poor and penniless, and I gave a promise to her father that I would go away without speaking to her. Although I kept my word, I thought she understood; and when by chance we met here, on this very spot where we are standing now, I believed that she was bound to me as I felt bound to her." Jack made a pause, as if to keep under his emotion, and then in a cold dry voice he added: "You know what had happened in the meantime. How, with poverty, sickness, starvation, staring at them, to save her father she had married *you*."

Ah, Jack! no need to fling such scorn into that word. The man before you feels to the full his inferiority; while you have been speaking, he has watched each turn of your mobile face, and summed up the scanty measure of his own merits.

"I knew it was to save her father," Christopher said; "but your name by either of them was never so much as mentioned. Until the day you called, when she had seen you here, I was ignorant that before she had been aware of your existence."

"What could a girl say of a man who had left her? She did not know that I was coming back. I did not realize myself then how I cared for her. I had known her so long as a child—a pet, a plaything—that the thought of anything more had hardly presented itself until, in telling me of his illness, her father spoke of her being left in the world alone and friendless."

"Was it you, then, who suggested that he should write to us?"

Jack gave an assenting movement.

"It seemed horrible," he said, as if in excuse, "to picture a girl like Robin without any natural protector. There was enough to shield her from while her father lived. He gone—what might have befallen her?"

"Hardly worse than threatens to befall her now," said Christopher sternly.

For a moment Jack stood silent.

"Your wife is perfectly innocent," he began; "and,

as far as that goes, this meeting which I asked of her was but to bid her farewell. I could not stay here and be silent any longer, and I was going away. My plans were settled, and all arrangements made. If your father's brutality had not driven her into my arms, we should be parted now—I should have left her. I could have gone then, with my secret safe in my own keeping." Christopher groaned audibly. "But now," continued Jack, his voice grown husky, his face working and troubled, "after seeing her on her knees before me, imploring help for our old friendship's sake, begging me to aid her in escaping from the insults and tyranny which are daily, hourly heaped upon her—never! Whom has she turn to if I fail her?"

The eyes that met his gave the answer.

"You are, I know, her husband; but ——"

"I am, unfortunately," said Christopher, "for her and for me too; but, believe me, I would never have been so had a word been dropped of you. It was what I begged her father to tell me, was there any obstacle he knew of against our marriage? and he said, 'No.'"

In the anguish of his soul the words Christopher spoke came bitterly.

"What motive had he to deceive me so cruelly? When I ——"

"He didn't know he was deceiving you," interrupted Jack chivalrously; "he but suspected Robin cared for me, and he had no faith in my love for her."

"But you did—you do love her?"

Jack looked at him with surprise, but made no answer.

"It is my one hope," Christopher continued; "if you love her, you will spare her. I told you I had heard almost all that had passed between you, and I know that she is in your power, and I am at your mercy."

Jack looked away; Christopher's face troubled him.

"Your father makes her life a very hell," he said.

"I promise that they shall not remain another day under the same roof together. Ask anything you will of me, and I swear to carry it out to the very letter."

Jack looked at him fixedly; his eyes were strained to search him through and through.

"And if so," he began, "after what you ———. Could I trust you to be the same to her?"

A flush deepened on Christopher's face.

"In anything which concerns her," he said sadly, "you may trust me entirely. My misfortune is to love her; my crowning misery," he added bitterly, "that she does not love me. Did I know of any sacrifice by which I could ensure her happiness, I should not hesitate to make it; but short of taking my own life, I cannot set her free. If I could, I would not come between you."

Was he speaking the truth? Jack felt an inward conviction of his sincerity forced upon him. In spite of the efforts he had made, he had never succeeded in thinking meanly of Christopher.

"You must give me until to-morrow," he said, and the struggle he was making showed itself in his face, and the hoarse broken tones of his voice. "Will you keep silent about this meeting to her?"

"If you desire it. From me she shall never hear that I have spoken to you."

"A letter sent to your house would be delivered to you unseen?"

"I will take care it is given into no other hand than my own."

"And a letter to her?"

"Shall be faithfully delivered."

There was a moment of hesitation; Jack looked as if he was going to speak again, then of a sudden he wheeled round, and to Christopher's surprise, he was gone. The crackling of bough and branch told the hasty retreat he was making; then all was still, and Christopher was left standing alone.

Like the rush of many waters, desolation overwhelmed him. No one was near—not an eye could see him; and casting himself on the ground, he lay still and motionless.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THOSE who, with eyes open, stand lingering on the edge of a precipice, are often surprised at the slight touch which sends them over. Some unexpected drift—some passing gust for a moment draws them nearer, and, already dizzy, they lose their footing before they realize their danger.

Such a whirlwind had overtaken Jack and Robin, urging them to a step which, even before parting, they began to repent of making. Alas! how few of us dare measure strength with Temptation! Secure, as we may think, at every point, there is yet some vulnerable spot by which we may be taken.

Robin, hurrying through the thicket, over the now dried-up brook, and back by the way she had been first led in coming, felt as if flying from something she could not escape. Certain words went sounding in her ears, repeating themselves in her mind, while their meaning eluded her:

"Go away—away with Jack—away from Christopher."

She rang the changes on these three sentences without feeling much affected by either. The numbness which follows on great emotional strain had overtaken her; and everything she did, she did mechanically.

In the house, coming out from the dining-room, she met the butler.

"Mr. Blunt's ordered his dinner in his own room, ma'am," said the man, with a perfect knowledge of the family fracas. "I don't know if Mr. Christopher's in or not; I saw him in the garden, but that was some time ago."

Robin continued on her way upstairs to her own room. She did not possess much that of a right she could lay claim to; but there were a few relics, trifles, souvenirs of her father, which, if she could not carry away, she must destroy. An old case in which, at the time of his death, letters were put to be read hereafter. Robin had never found heart to look at it since, but now necessity obliged her, and at haphazard she took out one of the letters and opened it. It was from her mother, written, before their marriage, to her father. She kissed it reverently, put it down, and drew out another. This time about herself. The mother away, wrote telling the father into what a sweet companion their child—their little Robin—had grown. And then, in all the fulness of maternal love, and with prophetic certainty that her end was drawing near, she entrusted the child to the father's care, trying to foreshadow the woman she would have her grown up into. A sudden gush of tears streamed from Robin's eyes. Underneath, in her father's writing, was written, "Her last letter, to be kept for Robin to read when she is a woman;" prefixed was the date, just after the death, in the very midst of his great sorrow. Robin turned it over, examining it carefully. Had it ever been read or looked at since? she wondered; and her thoughts went back to the stricken husband laying it aside for his child, and then at a leap she saw the child grown up—herself. She—Robin—was the little Robin spoken of in that letter. Involuntarily her head bowed down until her cheek lay pressed against the faded, faintly scented paper, the contact with which seemed to bring a sense of soothing to her.

Taking no count of time, Robin did not know how long she had remained resting, when a tapping at the door roused her.

"Yes," she said; "who is it?" and while speaking she had gone to the glass to mend the disarray of her dress and get her hair back into order. "Come in!"

It was Christopher; a glance told him what was

going on. There had not been time to put away the case; Robin had left it with the letters on the table.

"I am afraid you thought me rather harsh this afternoon," he began; and to afford her time to further recovery, he went back and drew the bolt of the door before taking a chair near her. "I have come to ask your pardon."

Robin strove to speak, but words would not come.

"It is very terrible," continued Christopher, "having to speak so at all to one's father, and say the things I had to say before you would be too humiliating—too bitter. Happily, Robin, experience has not taught you to feel for me there."

"Oh! but yes," she murmured, his voice making her look at his face, drawn, pinched with traces of suffering, the sight of which stabbed her. If a contest with his father so told upon Christopher, how would he live through what he would have now to endure!

"I often think of your father," he continued, sighing, "and how you must compare the two. What a light heart he had! What a gay spirit!"—the tears welled up into Robin's eyes. "I am glad I knew him—glad I was able to be of some little service to him—that he took a liking to me—trusted me—trusted me with you, Robin, his great treasure!"

He was looking at her now sadly—solemnly.

"We used to have many talks together he and I. He told me how sorely the thought had pressed on him of having to leave you so young, surrounded by so much temptation. The world looked very different to him then; things he had scoffed at, made light of before, he listened to then with pleasure; he would say, 'Tell it to Robin—talk to her about that.'"

"About what?" asked Robin huskily.

About our life here—how we have to struggle—make a constant warfare; if we be united again hereafter—and we hope to be, don't we?—with those we love—your father, mother, and her sister, whose dear name you bear. Long, long before I ever saw

you, I used to join in her prayer that God would bless and watch over little Robin Veriker."

The tears rained down from Robin's eyes, but Christopher, usually so ready to offer comfort, paid no heed to her.

Suddenly his attention seemed attracted to the letter-case.

"Have you been looking over that?" he asked. "What do you mean to do with the letters—leave them in it, or burn them?"

Robin, guilty as she felt, dare not look up to see if Christopher spoke with meaning. How should he, though? it was not possible—the question must be put by mere accident only.

"I have not decided yet," she said. "I have only read two or three of them."

"And the reading has upset you? I thought it would, when I laid them aside for you. Do you remember that day? In the evening we started for Spezzia. When, I wonder, shall we ever see Spezzia again, and the little garden—for it was a garden, full of gay blossoms, was it not, when we left him there, lying side by side with your mother?"

Unseen by Robin, Christopher had passed his hand over his brow; the effort he was making was almost too much for him.

"Do you ever wonder, Robin, whether it is possible that those taken from us are permitted to look down on us below? It is a fancy which has a great hold on me. I should like to think your father and our other dear ones could see us sometimes here together—you and me."

Robin could no longer keep down the sobs which mastered her control; the hand of an unseen influence seemed laid upon her. Wholly occupied with herself, and what she was about to do, it did not occur to her to ask why Christopher spoke to her thus. She only knew that each word he said awoke an echo in her breast—each stuck a separate thorn into her heart.

A dozen times his name, "Christopher," had risen to her lips; but, courage failing, before she had found voice to give it sound, she had snatched it back again. She wanted to tell him that she meant to go away—that she must leave him—could not stay with him any more—that she was going with Jack—that she ought not to have married him, because, though she did not know it, Jack had loved her all the time—and, though she had not said so, she had always loved him too. Confessions easy to make until she tried to shape them into words; and Christopher, sitting there silent, rapt in thought, had never before seemed so difficult to approach by her.

The wall of separation which had sprung up between them during the past months was suddenly visible to Robin's eyes, and on the threshold of the confessional she stood afraid to enter in.

"That is the bell," said Christopher, rising.

What! could he find heart to go down to dinner?

Robin shook her head.

"No," she said; I could not eat anything if I went."

Without a remonstrance he turned to go—to go! He—Christopher—wont to beg and implore, was leaving without a word!

Robin sat aghast. He did not care? Was he not well?

"Christopher," she said, as he was going out at the door, "you will come up again?"

"If you wish it; yes, certainly I will."

And without turning around, he went down, to go through the poor pretence of that mockery of dinner, sat out and partaken of for fear of remarks being made—of what the servants might say; for how was it possible that he could feel certain that Robin might not have been watched?—prying eyes might have dogged her steps with observation.

The thought gave him strength to assume more than his usu[illegible] concern. He spoke of some matters

going on in the village to the servant waiting; asked questions and made remarks on the weather; and every now and again his eyes fell on the vacant chair, and it was filled by her once wont to bear him constant company. They were back in Venice eating that first dinner, during which his heart had unbidden strayed from him—made captive by the grace of girlish gaiety. There was a dinner at Florence, he remembered; and one brought about by a chapter of accidents at Sestri Levante, every disaster of which she had turned into fun and laughter.

Oh, how cruel at times is memory! Christopher's heart sickened while recalling that happy past. Unconsciously he pushed back his chair, and then recollection seizing him, he stretched himself back as if only cramped by the way he was sitting.

"There's somebody outside waiting to speak to you, sir," said the servant. "I asked for his message, but he says he was told to see you."

Christopher was in the hall in a moment. A man standing there advanced, holding in his hand a letter.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but I was ordered not to give this to anybody but you; and will you be so good as to send a line in return, to say it reached you safe?"

Christopher took the letter, and went into the morning-room; his hands were trembling, so that he could hardly break the seal. At one glance he drank in the contents, and then his strength seemed to give away; his knees knocked together so he had to sit down and make an effort to recover breath. Could it be true? He read the words again.

"As soon as I know this has reached you I shall leave for Monkswell, so as to catch the midnight up-train. Get the enclosed safely delivered. I have said nothing about having seen you."

Over and over he went through that letter, as if to try and fix it in his mind; and then hastily rising, he wrote back:

"I thank you for what you have done. Your secret is safe in my keeping."

"Take that!" he said to the man; and he walked with him out of the house, and watched him through the plantation: and then he stood undecided what he should do next. The good tidings that had just reached him ought to lift half the load of care from his breast, instead of which a fresh smart was added to it.

The enclosure Jack had sent was a letter to be given to Robin. Looking at it, Christopher wondered, how was it worded? Had he dealt gently, tenderly with her?

"Poor child! poor child!" he murmured. Already the flood of pity had set in—for great love is very strong in compassion.

Towards Jack, Christopher felt all the rising of bitterness; it was the old story of the one ewe lamb desired by him who had the whole world to choose from. Up to the present point his thoughts had been centred on how best he should act so as to guard Robin against herself, and take her out of her tempter's power. This necessity no longer existed. Jack gone away, so far Robin was safe. The sigh of discontent told the sting of bitterness. Safe, because her husband, instead of a companion, would be henceforth turned into a spy, a gaoler.

If she would but trust him—tell him all! The thought of Robin believing herself deserted, cast down with shame, humiliated, was only in its measure less painful to Christopher than seeing her stand disgraced before the world.

O pity! generous dole of tender love!

Unable to decide how best to have the letter delivered so that no suspicion of his knowledge should be conveyed, Christopher put it safely into his pocket, and after awhile directed his steps back to the house, and then to Robin's room.

"What a long time you have been gone, Christo-

pher! I thought you did not mean to come back again."

Robin spoke in that tone of half-querulous reproach never adopted by those we are indifferent to.

"Is it late?" he said, looking at the clock. "The days are so long now. You would like some tea, wouldn't you?"

"No, not now."

While he had been absent Robin had been striving to gather up her courage; but the waiting had strained her highly strung nerves and filled her with an irritability she was hardly mistress of.

With an air of weariness Christopher took possession of an easy-chair, leaned back in it, and closed his eyes. How thin his face had gone—how drawn—how ill he looked!

"You don't seem well, Christopher: are you feeling ill?"

What a poisoner of content is suspicion! It was because she was going to leave him, believed that she was going away, that she assumed this anxious tone of inquiry.

"I have not felt very well for some time," he answered coldly.

What should she do? Robin felt a prey to despair. Oh for a kind word, a look to encourage her! Then she could tell him that, she had set herself to say; as it was, it seemed impossible.

Oddly enough, for the time, all thought of Jack seemed driven from her mind, swallowed up in the more immediate necessity of speaking to Christopher. Why did she wish to tell him? She could not say—she did not know. All that she was aware of was an infinite pressure laid on her—a feeling which impelled her to say something by way of reparation. How much, how little—all that was left; only he must not entirely misjudge her. Influenced still by the glamor cast over her by Jack, she could not endure to stab to death the love of Christopher.

And so she moved about the room, changing her seat, lingering, hovering about him, he all the while perfectly aware of her near presence, although seemingly paying no attention to it. "It is because of her going away," he kept repeating; "she wants to feel she has bidden me good-bye." Goaded by the thought which more and more pained him, he suddenly got up, feeling he could endure it no longer.

"Christopher, don't go—you mustn't. I—have something to tell you."

* * * * * *

A great writer has said that we should not lift the veil from the sanctuary of married life. With sobs, tears, and reiterations such as no pen could give force to, Robin told her tale, and, led on by Christopher, she laid her early love before him, hiding nothing, excusing nothing. And the daylight faded away, and dusk became darkness, obscuring all around; still on the ground, at her husband's feet, Robin sat. It was she who was silent now, he who talked, who pleaded, entreated, urged, until the dew of his speech moistened all that was good in the girl's heart, and raising up she said:

"I will write a letter to Jack and give it to you to send to him; you must take me away so that I never—never see him again."

Oh, blessed tears! let them flow, Robin. And Christopher, fold her in your arms, strain her to your heart; for the battle is yours, the victory is won!

That night Christopher locked up the two letters—the one from Robin, the other from Jack—together, unopened. Not a word had he said, not a hint had he given of the knowledge he was in possession of.

Believing that Jack would remain at Wadpole, Robin had made Christopher promise to take her away by an early train the following morning; and he, desirous that there should be no meeting with his father—from whom, according to his promise to Jack, he intended at once separating her—assented readily.

Further arrangements could be made hereafter, but in the same house they must no longer live together.

As the key turned in the desk a sigh escaped from Christopher; he leaned his head on his hands and stayed standing there. Did a vision foreshadow a time to come—perhaps near, perhaps far away—when those letters should be given each to its rightful owner?

CHAPTER XXXV.

AMONG a small community trifling events make a great stir. The sudden departure of the Squire, followed by the unexpected exodus of Christopher and Robin, furnished Wadpole with a nine days' wonder.

Why had they gone? Where had they gone? Had they gone together? Questions which everybody asked, and nobody could answer.

Old Blunt said his son was a fool. Mrs. Temple did not believe another woman living had such a daughter. Speculation was rife—opinions varied. And then, the excitement over, the disturbance began to settle down; and very soon, except to the few concerned, the whole matter became stagnant.

"Here we are as we were," said Georgy Temple to Mr. Cameron.

She had been spending the morning at the school-house, and was walking home by a strangely circuitous route with the curate; in order, so they said, to fully discuss an impending treat got up for the children between them.

"And I, for one, am not sorry," said Mr. Cameron, with that gratulatory hug of himself together; "somehow, Georgy, I never felt altogether secure while that cousin Jack of yours was hanging about you for ever."

"Didn't you?" she said, with a little indulgent laugh at him. "Oh, you need not have had any fear—there were two insuperable obstacles in the way; but if there

had not been, I don t know that Jack and I would ever have given a thought to one another."

"Two obstacles—insuperable! What were they?"

"Well, on the one part—my part, you know—there was—*you*."

"Oh!"

"Ah, it is 'Oh!' and it was 'Oh!' on Jack's part, too; for his obstacle was Mrs. Christopher Blunt."

"Hush, Georgy! don't speak of it in that way. I don't like to hear you."

"But the mischief's over now, dear boy. I was very angry with Jack for a time; however, it's come all right. At heart, he's a thorough good fellow—oh, you'll see it when you've got over being jealous of him—and in the end he listened to what I had to say, and made a clean cut and run of it altogether."

"It was strange his going, and then their going the next day."

"Yes; I've never made that out—never quite fathomed it. I should like to feel certain why Mrs. Christopher went away."

"Christopher told me—and I feel sure he would not tell me an untruth—that he had had a great fall out with his father."

"Well, then, I wish they had done their falling-out the day before; then Jack need not have gone, you know."

"No?" Mr. Cameron still spoke half-heartedly. "I wonder if he knows where they are?"

"I don't think so," said Georgy; "I don't see how he should. You had not heard from Christopher when I answered Jack's letter; and, by the way, it would be as well to caution you against telling me anything you fancy they would not like him to know, because I gave him my solemn word to tell him every scrap I heard about them—good, bad, or indifferent."

"So I told Christopher."

"Told Christopher! what for?"

"Because I didn't want him to say anything to me

that I might not say to you. It might have slipped out unawares," he added in explanation, "when we were talking; because I just let my tongue run when I am with you. That's the beauty of it; you can't do that, can you, with any other person?"

Georgy smiled approvingly.

"Now about our engagement," began Mr. Cameron; "you know it's high time we made that known, because I've spoken to you're father already."

"I know you have; but what about mother—have you said anything to her yet?" and she showed two rows of little pearly teeth mockingly.

Mrs. Temple's acts of aggression towards Mr. Cameron were known to everybody. From the first day of his arrival she had commenced hostilities with him—hostilities which he had suffered and born so meekly, that she was encouraged to step over the threshold of her own domain, and enter into the region of his duties. But at the first onset the curate met her. Thus far and no farther was written on his face; and somehow Mrs. Temple found herself not only repulsed but very much worsted in the encounter. Similar attacks met with similar defeats.

"Mother finds that Tommy Puss has claws," said Georgy, who hadn't fallen in love then; and honoring the courage of the hitherto shy quiet new-comer, she had combined with her father to protect him; and the cudgels taken up in his defence did not improve Mr. Cameron's position with her mother.

"Well, no," he said, rubbing his chin, "I haven't; but I mean to, though. I was wondering when would be the best time to speak."

"If you ask me, the time I should choose would be whenever we saw some prospect of getting married."

Mr. Cameron turned a little more round, and looked at her.

"Oh yes, I know," she said, singing "'When will that be? say the bells of Stepney.'"

"Why, my dear girl, a great deal sooner than you

think. I'm the most lucky fellow in the world—ah, you may laugh, Georgy, but I am. Well, now, only see! When I was ordained first, I thought I was certain to go to Kensington; it seemed settled there was nothing else for it, when all at once—nobody could tell how—the appointment came for me to go to Wapping! That's only one instance; but I could give you a dozen more. When the fever was raging at Homerton, I didn't see a chance of going there; I wanted above all things to be sent to that hospital—but how? Suddenly dear old Nicolls falls sick; there's a vacancy, and into it they pop me. And then, above all else, there's you, Georgy. Who, in the name of Fate, would ever have supposed I should have a chance with you?—and yet you accept me. Oh, talk of luck, I should think I was lucky, rather! 'Pon my word, if anything, I'm almost afraid to wish for things—they're so certain to come to me."

"Then, if you don't begin, from this very instant, to wish as hard and fast as ever you can for a living to be given you, don't expect anything from me."

"And so I will;" and he joined Georgy in laughing heartily. "What shall it be? where shall we say? I'll tell you—Bethnal Green, eh? or better still, there's a little iron church in a street close by New Square, in the Minories. I've often had my eye on that; and it mightn't be so difficult to get either."

Georgy shook with laughter.

"Upon my word," she said, "that's pretty well, a choice between blind beggar's daughters and old clothes-selling Jews."

"Well, wouldn't you like it?"

"No; most certainly I shouldn't. I thought you meant some place that was—well, at least respectable."

"Respectable!"—he gave a shrug of horror. "Oh, no, Georgy, don't let us go in for that. I've had as much as I can stand of respectability here. The other is so much nicer—so much pleasanter; life is a different thing there;" and in his enthusiasm he seemed

to sniff its air afar. "You have work to do from morning till night, and something fresh always turning up."

"But I don't like the thought of the place any more than of the people."

"Don't you," he said disconsolately.

"You forget that I am country born and bred. I should miss the sight of the fields and all the beasts and cattle about dreadfully."

"H'm! what is to be done, I wonder?"

"Isn't there anything to be done here?" she asked. "They don't all seem to me so tremendously good, somehow."

"It isn't that they're by any means good, but they're offended if you tell them so. They would think it presumptuous to feel secure of heaven, but you insult them by the mere suggestion of hell. Hell is a place for those who outrage society—who break the laws—are sent to prison. The outcasts at Uplands are those whom you should speak to about hell, not to Wadpole and its respectable inhabitants—isn't it true, now?"

"Yes, I'm afraid it is; but then Uplands isn't a separate parish, you know."

"It might be made so at any time. All you want is somebody to rebuild the church, and give something further to endow it—with the consent of the rector, of course—that you know."

"And where's that somebody to come from, pray?"

"Ah! that's the question;" and he shook his head.

"Very well, then," said Georgy, by way of teasing him; they had come to the end of the cross-roads, the spot where they intended parting. "Then *there's* a thing for you to wish for; only bring that to pass, and I'll believe in you."

"And marry me at once, and work with me? All right; then you'll see."

"It will be all right when I do see," she said disbelievingly; and then after a few words of good-bye they turned away from each other—Mr. Cameron to

make some sick calls, Georgy to return home and listen to those never-ending jeremiads and jobations, of which she was daily growing more and more weary.

Her mother let her have no peace. Jack's sudden departure served for the continual dripping on the stone. Unless it had been to propose, why, the morning of his departure, had he come up to seek Georgy? and if she had not refused him, what reason was there for his going away? With the view of receiving the sympathy of her neighbors, Mrs. Temple, when before them, pointed all her lamentations with certainty, but in the presence of her husband and her daughter she felt much less secure. The rector had either no satisfaction to give, or he was determined not to give it her; and as for Georgy, she could get nothing from her but a continual "No, no."

It was quite refreshing to meet old Blunt, and together rail out against their two children.

Christopher and Robin had been gone nearly a month. They had left Sevenoaks, where they had first stopped, and were now at Whitby, hoping that Robin might be benefited by the sea.

"Into which she might fall, for all I should care," said Mr. Blunt candidly. "By that marriage, ma'am" —he was imparting this information to Mrs. Temple —"I've lost a son and I haven't gained a daughter. Indeed, to tell the truth, what I have gained would be hard to say. She hadn't got no money; didn't come of, as you may say, anybody in partikler; and there's no sign o' family—no likelihoods of it neither, so far as I can see." Mrs. Temple agreed there was reason for his dissatisfaction. "They've taken themselves off from here, and I'm left all alone by myself, high and dry, with nobody to see and nobody to speak to."

"Oh, that is really very hard on you, Mr. Blunt."

"Hard—it is indeed! it's more than I can go on putting up with, too. I haven't been used to live without company. I've had two wives already, and if they don't mind their P's and Q's I shall be drove into tak-

ing another; and then Mrs. Christopher had better look out for herself, for matters might take a turn which 'ud end in putting her husband's nose out o' joint."

"Oh, it's terrible," said Mrs. Temple, sympathetically, "the way children behave! You know, Mr. Blunt, I have a daughter."

"I know you have, ma'am; and all I can say is, I wish your daughter was mine—that I do."

"Oh, it's very kind of you!" and Mrs. Temple tried not to speak too condescendingly; "but my daughter is so very peculiar, that I am not at all sure, if the Prince of Wales had made her an offer, whether she would not have said 'No.' Young ladies who can refuse to make such a marriage as she might have made, I don't know what one may not expect of them."

"You don't think it's got in no way to do with your curate, Mr. Cameron, do you?"

"No, I don't," said Mrs. Temple sharply.

Mr. Blunt felt he had made a mistake, and hastened to say:

"Where might the Squire be gone to?"

"To Norway."

"Norway! h'm! There it is, you see; another man drove from his home. Oh, it's a very serious matter, I can tell you; for unless things can be arranged, and I can bring my son to his senses, I shan't be able to go on staying here neither."

Mr. Blunt's mode of bringing his son to his senses rested entirely on the power he possessed of withholding the necessary supplies of money. Brought up in the certainty that whatever he wanted he could have, Christopher's expenditure had only been limited by his very simple tastes and habits. His father made it a matter of reproach that he wouldn't spend money like a gentleman, and it was with a certain degree of satisfaction, that Mr. Blunt had noticed how greatly since his marriage Christopher's ideas had expanded.

So long as they remained where their neighbors could be dazzled by it, nothing was too costly for them

to have, to do, to wear; but away from Wadpole, Mr. Blunt in one place, Christopher and Robin in another, the whole circumstances were changed. Not only did he derive no satisfaction from the money they were spending, but he had the knowledge that they enjoyed it the more because he had no share in it.

In a letter written on their departure, Christopher had firmly but most considerately told him, how impossible it was that they all should remain living under one roof together. On the score of his health he expressed the wish to leave England for the winter, and he implored his father to allow further arrangements to stand over until they came back; then they would meet and come to some final decision together.

But of late years, Mr. Blunt had not been a man to listen to reason. He who had made his fortune; who, by his own energy, had climbed rung by rung until he found himself standing on the top step of the ladder, be dictated to by his son, put down and set at nought by that Veriker's daughter—he no longer thought of Robin as his daughter-in-law—never! It was she who had dictated this; she who had put Christopher up to defying his father; and it was she who should be paid out for it.

"I won't take no notice of that," he said, regarding the letter wrathfully; "if they choose to chalk out their own way, let 'em take it. I shan't interfere."

So the letter remained unanswered. Later on, before going to Whitby, Christopher wrote again. No reply came. Only through Mr. Cameron they heard that Mr. Blunt had shut up the house and left for London.

CHAPTER XXXVI

FROM the time he was ten years old—the epoch of that terrible fever—Christopher Blunt had never enjoyed good health; but the worry of ways and means, the harass of business, the struggle to get on, had been

spared him. Everything he wanted he had, everything he wished for he got. Suddenly a check was put on all this. Although he continued to write to his father, more than once referring to his fast-dwindling resources, there came no answer. What was to be done? The arrangements by which he was to have secured a separate allowance had never been properly concluded. A small income—under two hundred a year—the rent of some houses, left when a lad to him, was positively all there was to depend on, until the old man relented. He kept this from Robin as long as he could, and then, feeling there was nothing to be done, he had to tell her of it—to ask her what she would like him to do—to put it to her how she would wish him to act; there was no further doubt his father intended to starve them out.

Few things had Christopher felt more acutely than speaking of this matter to Robin. Since he had left Wadpole, strive as he did, it was plain to see everything was an effort to her. The wish to go out, to sit at home, to keep up a conversation, to seem interested —all was assumed; and Christopher, in his sympathy for her suffering, would affect some occupation which would afford her the opportunity to steal away, to sit alone and brood on her misery—for do what she would, Robin was miserable. It is easier, under great emotion, to promise that we will be as we were before, than, the excitement over, to resume that footing. A strain of affectation was put on Christopher as well as on Robin; neither could afford to be quite natural for fear of what the other might be presuming. And then there was that constant torment about Jack. What did he think? where was he gone? what was he doing? He had never taken any notice of her letter, and strive as reason might to assure her it was better so, a thousand sad repinings said how easily he accepted all she said without striving so much as to send her an answer.

Robin could put no faith in the hints about Mr.

Cameron and his engagement to Georgy. Well posted in all the rumors about her and Jack—perhaps now—there together—she gone—why not? Many a heart had been caught on the rebound! And Christopher, watching her, felt himself grow sad; was there to be no happiness for them in life together?

Up to this point there had been the satisfaction that he could give her all she wanted, gratify her every wish. Now this poor comfort was to be taken from him. Unless she consented to return with him to his father, how were they to live? A sickening sense of the future swept over Christopher. Before him arose the insults, disputes, quarrels, and more than all, the humiliation of being obliged to break his word to Jack.

Stirred by these feelings he set the matter of the whole proceeding before Robin, and then waited her reply.

"And what is it you wish to do?" she asked wearily.

"Wish to do, Robin," and he looked at her fixedly. "My wish would be to stay away—to remain here."

"Then let us stay—it is what I want too." The words were spoken in the voice of the Robin of old, and seeing he did not answer she added: "Don't think it is because I am wishing you to defy your father—no; but—" and she hesitated, "we are so much better here, by ourselves—together, you and I."

"There is no need to say more. I am only too glad to keep away; my hesitation was entirely about you." Poor Christopher had never had to bear the shifts of poverty. "We shall have so little to live on, you know."

"But I have lived on nothing at all," she said gaily, "positively nothing, often—before we met you."

"Well then, now you'll have to turn your knowledge to account;" and he laughed, and she joined him—absolutely the first real interchange of sympathy since they had been away.

"We shall have to leave here," she began.

"Yes, so I was thinking."

"We had best begin to pack up at once;" and then, the recollection of former flittings coming across her, she added, "Shall we be able to pay them before we go?"

Christopher's face expressed his astonishment at such an idea.

"Oh, but we've often had to leave with money owing," she said, "when we went away."

"You always contrived to pay them though, later, didn't you?" Christopher spoke this more by the way of talking than asking a question; Robin looked a little shame-faced.

"Not always; I'm afraid we didn't. We couldn't, we hadn't the money to—not to pay everybody; some one would have had to go without, that's certain."

"But you wouldn't like to do that now, I hope." Christopher spoke gently. "You would not like to have what you could not pay for, would you?"

"I did not like it then," she said frankly; "but papa hated poky lodgings, he wouldn't live in them." Then feeling some further plea was needed, she added, "There were many excuses to be made for him, poor papa! he had been brought up so differently; you must not be hard on him, Christopher."

"Hard, my dear?"

"No, I didn't mean that; I don't think it possible that you could be hard on anybody."

And somehow their hands had met and had held together, and Robin looking up shyly found Christopher's eyes fixed upon her, and he drew her towards him unresistingly, held her a moment, and then kissed her tenderly; and the ice which had held both hearts seemed melted away.

* * * * * *

Happiness often knocks at our door disguised as poverty, and one test of love is to recognize the incognito.

During the six months from midsummer to midwinter, which Robin and Christopher spent in struggling on together, it gave to him felicity, it brought to her content. Their narrowed means forced them to test their individual resources, and thrown into constant companionship, they grew to entirely depend the one on the other.

How impossible that those of high estate living in great luxury, should estimate some of the joys—the blessings which surround the poor.

Indigence at most times means misery; but that estate, in which simple wants have all their needs supplied, makes no demand on pity.

The experience which Robin and Christopher were now going through was laying up a bright store for the future—about which they were less anxious than one would think possible. Christopher still wrote regularly every now and then to his father, although the letters were never answered; but they were received, because they were not returned.

Since shutting up his house, Mr. Blunt had not returned to Wadpole; he was in his old quarters in London, living there surrounded by a good many off-relations, and by boon companions, none of them very desirous of furthering a better understanding with his son. It was shameful, they all declared, such treatment of such a father; and they would chorus forth eulogiums on him, with corresponding strictures on the conduct of Christopher—servility accepted by the old man, but not palatably swallowed. He was tired of the life he was leading, a little ashamed of it in the bargain, and only that he had never given in in his life, he would have written asking Christopher what he wanted. Already he had turned over in his mind divers plans how matters might be arranged between them. If they would not live with him they might live near him The mystery was how they were managing to live at all. Benson, his agent, had told him that he had paid the rent of the two houses over; but

that, all deducted, for the six months didn't mean much more than a hundred pounds clear.

Since the last time he had heard—about the beginning of November—Mr. Blunt had felt terribly low-spirited and disconsolate; and though he continued to hold Robin responsible, as being the sole cause of this disunion, seeing she was not present and could not hear him, he found no satisfaction in anathematizing her. Opposite as they were in habits, disposition, nature, he and his son—difficult as it was without sympathy of thought, mind, and taste, to get on with one another—old Blunt had sufficient perception of good to recognize the merits of Christopher; and the uneasiness he often felt in his presence was due to the fact that in him he saw a being of a superior order.

"He's certain at Christmas to write again," he said to himself, "so I'll wait as long as then, and then I'll answer his letter. I'm sick o' this way o' going on altogether. And I'll go down to Wadpole, it'll keep me straight being there, and help to pull me a bit together before I see him again."

And in prospect of carrying out this decision he sent orders to get the house ready; and by the second week in December he was installed at Priors.

"He looks years older than when he went away," everybody said when Mr. Blunt passed by; and it was remarked that his hand trembled, his gait was unsteady, feeble; altogether, they decided that he was uncommonly shaky, and seemed in rather a bad way.

Ever ready to find fault with somebody, the tide of opinion turned against Christopher. It was held undutiful in an only son to leave his father; and that the old man felt it so, might be seen by the change in him since he had been away. In turn, they laid on Robin her share of blame. Young people should not be so headstrong; and if a girl married a man, and got a good home, it was very hard if she couldn't put up with his father's temper.

Mr. Blunt found that a good many people called, and

most of them gave him their sympathy, which at that time he was by no means in want of; and then they forgot all about him, and he was left to himself, solitary and alone, except when Mr. Cameron or Georgy Temple, sometimes singly, sometimes together, paid him a visit. These two, close friends to Christopher, stuck loyally by him. Mr. Cameron—by reason of his office able to speak plainly—often talked with the old man, and lost nothing of his favor because he spoke the honest truth regarding his son. But at Mr. Blunt's age, backed up by a life's practice, the golden speech of St. Chrysostom would hardly have prevailed against his stubbornness. He wanted to make peace with his son—he wanted to have him back with him—but he could not bring his mind to make the first advances. No, he would wait until the next letter came, and then he would answer it; and in the meantime, as a salve to his conscience, he laid his plans, and searched the neighborhood over for a house, that he might not only be ready to accede to, but seem to forestall, the demands they might make of him.

But Christmas went by, and the New Year set in, without any letter coming from Christopher.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

UNABLE to endure the loneliness of his situation, Mr. Blunt, for the first time, had sent for a few of his friends to bear him company at the Priors. The season was a festive one—to gross minds a fitting time for self-indulgence; and thinking it possible such a chance might not come again, they saw no reason why they should not make the most of their opportunity.

It is a curious fact how intolerant domestics are of those taken from their own rank and raised to a class above them. Most of Mr. Blunt's servants at one time or other had had experience of families where such after-dinner excesses as they now saw had at least hap-

pened, if they were not of frequent occurrence—but, except perhaps, between themselves—to comment on it had not been thought of by them ; now, without hesitation, they made the behavior of the irmaster and his friends a matter of chit-chat and gossip, until, the reports swelling, all Wadpole was scandalized through the orgies at the Priors.

"I shall write to Christopher," said Mr. Cameron, speaking to Georgy Temple and her father, "and tell him it is his duty to return home. Don't you think I ought to, sir ?" he asked, addressing the rector.

"I think it would be kind in you, Cameron. What do you say, Georgy ?"

"I don't see any reason on earth why they should not return. Jack seems lost to us for ever ;" and she sighed lugubriously.

Georgy had hoped that, on his return from Norway, Jack would have come back to Wadpole, instead of which he had written to say he was going to India ; his mother had begged him to pay her a visit, and as she was getting an old woman now, perhaps if he did not go he might some day regret that he had refused her.

"I don't know why he should regret," Georgy had said ; "she never took any notice of him before. She wouldn't now if he was not the Squire of Wadpole."

"All the more credit due to him for not refusing her," said the rector.

"Oh, that's all very fine ; but perhaps we may never see him again."

"Don't you trouble yourself there. Jack will come back in due time, and bring a wife with him, I shouldn't wonder."

"I wish he would; that would put a stop to mother."

"Not a bit of it, my dear. If your mother saw that one worry missed fire, she'd very soon have a pop at us with another."

"Yes; but it's pretty near time Dora took her turn now, and I was left to settle down with that 'miserable,

mean, insignificant little Cameron,'" she said, admirably affecting the manner of her mother.

"Come, come, Georgy! don't bear malice."

"Oh, I don't bear malice; but I don't like it either, particularly when he has so few to stand up for him. I don't think he has a friend left here except you, father."

"Christopher Blunt will be coming back soon, I dare say. Where is he now?"

"Still at Whitby, I hear."

"Whitby! that's a funny place for them to be! What are they doing there?"

"Enjoying themselves, I suppose, as people with money seem always able to do. Christopher said in his last letter that he had never been so well, and never so happy; I wrote and told Jack so. Papa, I do think it a great mistake to be poor—really I do."

"I'm quite of your opinion, my dear; but that does not mend matters much with you or me."

"And then mother to be always going on about I wouldn't marry Jack. Well, I wouldn't; but if I had wanted to, he wouldn't have married me."

"Tell her so, Georgy—tell her so."

"And have it all over the place? why, no; that would never do. All the same, though, I think the Christopher Blunts owe a debt of gratitude to Colin and to me." And at this point Mr. Cameron had joined them, and mooted the question of writing to Christopher. "You might tell them that Jack has gone to India, too," said Georgy, "in case he had anything to do with their going away from here."

So the letter was written, and sent off to Christopher, and then Mr. Cameron betook himself to Priors to pay Mr. Blunt a visit. He found him irritable and angry—his visitors had left him; and though he said nothing about the non-arrival of the expected letter, it was plain to see how much the disappointment affected him.

For the first time he blustered in his old way about

his son, and then suddenly his voice broke into almost a whine, as he demanded the curate's pity for a man left alone in his old age—deserted by his own flesh and blood, as he was.

"But I don't see that you can make that accusation against Christopher," said Mr. Cameron stoutly. "Think how often he has written and you have sent him no answer. The desertion—so it seems to me—rather lies at your door."

Perhaps the reproach stung the father; anyway, Mr. Blunt put himself into an ungovernable rage. These recent bouts had lost him the small measure of control he ever had over his temper, and the picture given to Mr. Cameron then, made him sympathize with his two friends more than ever.

Returning home with those coarse vituperations against Robin still sounding in his ears, Mr. Cameron wondered had he done right in urging their return.

"I've half a mind to write again," he thought, "and suggest that it might be best if Christopher came to see his father alone."

Only a little time before Christopher had made a similar suggestion to Robin. "It is of no use writing," he had said; "I see that. I have been thinking whether it would not be best for me to go and see my father and talk to him."

The winter, so far rather a severe one, had taxed their resources considerably, and Christopher felt his health was suffering from some of the deprivations he had been obliged to submit to.

Perceiving that he was not well—for constantly together as they were now, it was impossible, as of old, to hide from her how much at times he suffered—Robin proposed that they should remove to London; and Christopher, hoping that he might be benefited by the change to milder air, readily assented.

They made the journey in December, about a week before Christmas; the carriage they traveled in was

cold and draugnty, and Christopher took a chill which confined him to bed for a few days, and to the house for more than a week after. Anxious to get away from the hotel, the expenses of which they could ill afford, he did not give himself time to recover, and the first day he was able to dissemble he declared himself perfectly well, and able to set off in search of lodgings, which they had hoped to find in one of the suburbs. Robin was prevailed on, though very unwillingly, to remain behind; the day was bitterly cold, and Christopher said he should get through his business quicker without her.

In addition to looking for the lodgings, he was bent on finding if his father had left London. Owing to their removal from Whitby, Mr. Cameron's letter had not yet reached him. If the old man was at Wadpole, Christopher intended, after seeing Robin settled, to go down there. He knew with whom he had to deal, and nothing but an intimate knowledge of that overbearing temper had made him hold out as he had done. To do him justice, every letter he had written had been conciliatory, and he never permitted his father to perceive that the violence and insults heaped on him at their parting had in any way rested with him.

None but himself knew how much before going away he had been made to suffer, and the taunts that they would soon return, begging to be taken back, had assisted very greatly in keeping him away. It had not been a question of pride so much as one of self-respect; Christopher felt that after what had passed he owed it to himself, as well as to Robin, that the first advances towards capitulation should come from the aggressor. The object he had in seeking this interview was to come to a plain, straightforward understanding of what Mr. Blunt intended to do in respect to their future income. With the possibility of Robin by any chance accident being left alone in the world, Christopher trembled to think how little there

would be for her. So far, there had been expensive articles of jewelry parted with to meet pressing occasions; but these were nearly all gone. Their wardrobe, too, needed replenishing; Christopher's clothes were anything but suitable for such inclement weather.

Notwithstanding his fatigue, he returned to Robin in excellent spirits. His day had been a successful one; the lodgings he had secured he was certain would please her, and he had learned through Mr. Benson, whom he had seen, that his father had gone down to Priors.

"And I have something for you—a letter from Mr. Cameron," said Robin. "I wouldn't give it to you before, because I thought you wanted your dinner; and I haven't opened it, that we might read it together."

She had put an easy-chair for Christopher in front of the fire, and she brought over a footstool and sat down at his knee, leaning her head against him, so that, with him, she might read the letter.

They went through the contents, neither stopping nor making comment until they reached the end; then, simultaneously, he said, "I am very grieved to hear this about my father;" and she, "Fancy, Jack gone to India, to see his mother!"

Many confidences had passed between Christopher and Robin during these six months together, and though Jack was seldom made the subject of conversation between them, there was no longer any awkwardness in speaking his name.

"I think the wish to see his mother says a great deal for him," said Christopher, ever ready to sink what was of interest to him in that which interested her. "It is a long voyage to make for affection, and it is hardly to be supposed that he feels more than duty for her."

"No," said Robin dreamily, and they sat silent for awhile. Suddenly she asked: "What was that about your father? I didn't quite take it in. Read it to me again."

Christopher read what Mr. Cameron had said, and then he sighed heavily.

"Oh, but I shouldn't be in too great a hurry to believe it all," said Robin encouragingly. "You see he tells you," she went on, referring to the letter, "that what he says is principally from the rumors he has heard in the village."

"Yes; but I don't think Cameron would write unless he felt certain that what he said was true."

"At the same time, he speaks of your father being very anxious to see you."

"Yes, I am glad I am going down."

"When will you go?"

"I think the day after to-morrow. I shall just wait to see you settled, and then—particularly after this—I won't delay it longer. Being laid up has been such a drawback; I had counted on seeing him before the new year."

"Shan't you write to say you are coming?"

"No."

"But supposing he isn't there?"

"Oh, I think he's sure to be. Cameron speaks as if he had gone down to remain; and it looks like it, having those people down there."

"Do you know them?" Robin asked.

The vexed look in Christopher's face was plain to her.

"I dare say I know who they are," he said sadly. "That is the worst of his being left alone; he has no resources. You see, reading does not amuse him; he has nothing to do, and no friends there who go to see him or whom he can go to see."

"He must be very lonely. I wish he was different, Christopher," and then she rubbed her cheek against his hand. "I see," she said, "that what Mr. Cameron has said is paining you."

"It is, a little."

She laid down her head again, murmuring softly, "Poor Christopher! dear Christopher!"

Had Robin never known love, surely this feeling might well have deceived her. Those to whom Happiness has not shown her face often pass through life mistaking Content for her.

But Robin had tasted of the higher joy; it lay as in a grave dug deep down in her heart, watered by her tears, sacred by her sorrow. As the mourner is wont to lift again the drooping head, so Christopher's tenderness and generosity had raised hers. Biding his opportunity, he had dropped words from time to time which had gradually taken root and sprung up to blossom. A higher motive guided Robin now, and Christopher rejoiced to feel that should he ever be called from her, no longer would that fair bark be left without a rudder.

Many of us fail to appreciate how much we owe to habit. In youth, impulse is a dangerous leader; and in the emergencies of life, unless daily practice has trained us to decide rightly, it is far more than likely that we are led astray.

There were moments when the past rose up before Robin and made her shudder. Some newspaper report, a repeated story, a chance encounter, and she drew closer to Christopher: from what a fate he had rescued her! Robin took no credit to herself. "Had he not talked to me," she said, "that night as he did, what should I be now?" And then, thinking of Jack, how much more clearly did she read his character! Dealing generously with the forbearance he had shown when he had her in his power—for Robin recognized how from the first moment he had held complete influence over her—she sent her heart up in thanksgiving that Jack's life was still his own to shape, unfettered save perhaps by a memory of her. Her woman's nature clung to the hope of that memory; she could not bear to think that he could altogether forget her.

"I should like him sometimes to recall those days" —and a tear stole slowly down her cheek—"when he was penniless as we were—poor Jack!—and I was lit-

tle Robin Veriker;" and her thoughts straying to that bygone past, she would think of the untaught, run-wild child she was, and of the teaching for good which Jack had tried to instill into her. And in those recollections love was forgotten in gratitude for the teacher; and tracing the development of those qualities higher, Jack's image would fade away, and his place be filled by Christopher.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MADE thoughtful by the contents of Mr. Cameron's letter, it did not seem strange that for the rest of the evening Christopher should be unusually silent. He did not tell Robin he felt so weary that mere ordinary speaking was an effort to him. In his own mind he set down this sense of fatigue to his late indisposition. "That attack has pulled me down," he said, "and made me weaker than I thought myself."

There had been a time in Christopher's life when his weakly health, except so far as it interfered with his comfort, was a matter of very little concern to him; the world had not held out many attractions, and he was not disturbed in the least to think he might possibly be called on to leave it early. But since Robin had been his wife, and more particularly since this renewal of a good understanding between them, Christopher had been conscious of a desperate clinging to life, of building on the future, counting on long years to come, to be spent by Robin and him together.

"I feel rather tired," he said at length, noticing that Robin had put down her book and was looking at him.

"Still you don't seem disposed to move."

"No, that's just it. I could drop off to sleep here where I am, sitting in my chair."

"Get along," she said, giving him a shake; "you go upstairs, and I'll tell them about calling us, and giving us our breakfast early."

Naturally a light sleeper, Robin was surprised to find Christopher already asleep when she went into the room, and so soundly that he did not hear her enter.

He seemed to continue sleeping until morning, when, between three and four, he was awakened by a fit of shivering, increasing in violence, and becoming so severe, that Robin implored him to let her send for a doctor.

No; he thought it would pass; it was but a return of his cold. If she would put some more clothes on the bed, and, as soon as they were stirring, ask for some hot tea, he thought he should be better.

But in spite of all that Robin could do, her suggestions and remedies were of no avail; a terrible pain in the side seized him—it was like the sticking of a knife each time he drew a breath. He got restless, feverish, and the suggestion of a doctor again made, he no longer opposed it.

The next day Christopher was announced to be suffering from a severe attack of pneumonia and pleurisy following on his previous indisposition. The doctor viewed the case gravely. "He has caught cold again; got another chill," he said. And Robin feared he had; but, unacquainted with illness as she was, a cold, which he frequently caught and always recovered from, gave her no alarm.

"He'll soon be all right again, don't you think?"

"Oh, I quite hope so. Why? were you thinking of sending for some one to help you?" The wish was put warily.

"No; I can do all the nursing he wants. But he had thought of going to see his father."

"Ah! I'm afraid he will have to put that off for some little time now. Would it not be as well to ask his father to come and see him?"

"Not at present, I think; we shouldn't care to." And seeing there was actually at present no necessity, the doctor did not urge it further.

The next day, however, Christopher was worse.

Then his mind began to wander; and Robin, frightened beyond measure at a symptom always distressing to those around, sent off a telegram to Mr. Blunt:

"Come directly this reaches you. Christopher is very ill."

Again and again Mr. Blunt read these words over. The sight of them seemed to paralyze him; he was seized with the certainty that his son was dying—perhaps even dead before now. What should he do? When did the next train go? Already he had summoned a servant and sent him to seek information.

The next train was the 5:50, there was none before; it was now three o'clock. Three hours to wait! how should he endure them? The suggestions that went coursing through his mind seemed like to madden him.

"Go to Mr. Cameron," he said at length, in desperation. "Ask him to come to me. Say—I want him."

He had meant to send word that Christopher was ill, but was unable to mention his son's name. At the moment when he was going to speak it, his voice had failed him.

From the servant Mr. Cameron learnt the cause of the summons, and with ready sympathy at once obeyed it. How strangely altered seemed their relative positions since they last met! Then Mr. Blunt's hectoring and bluster had completely cowed the sensitive organization of the curate; his loud voice jarred upon him and drove him to silence. Now it was Mr. Cameron who spoke, Mr. Blunt who listened, hanging on every word of assurance and encouragement the other gave him.

Skilled in administering comfort, Mr. Blunt found himself gaining courage; he was another being since Mr. Cameron had come. But what would happen when he left him? There was still to be bridged over that two hours' journey in the train, and the drive from the station. Oh, the delay was sickening!

"Shall I go up with you? Would you like it?"

Mr. Blunt almost broke down under the weight of his gratitude; it was the very thing he had been longing for, but had not dared to ask. Those who never put themselves out to accommodate others, when wanting favors for themselves are apt to over-estimate their obligation.

It was nothing to Mr. Cameron to accompany him to London. He would have made the same offer, only more readily, to the poorest parishioner.

"Then pick me up at my lodgings as you go past," he said; and away he rushed to run in at the rectory, so that they might know for what reason he had gone away.

"I'll walk down with you," said Georgy; and there she was standing when Mr. Blunt drove up, ready with cheery words and good wishes to start them on their way.

"And tell Mrs. Christopher if she wants any help to send for me; I'm a first-rate hand at sick-nursing, you know."

Who, at parting, shall say what their next meeting may be?

Mr. Blunt and Robin had never seen each other since that day when Christopher had come between them; then, furious, exasperated, their thoughts had been centred on themselves, their anger on each other. Now, when, with noiseless steps and knees that trembled under him, Mr. Blunt found himself at the door of the sick-room out of which Robin had come, both he and she seemed to have merged their individuality. For her, he was Christopher's father; for him, she was Christopher's wife. Had he taken her hand? Had she given it? What matter? they did not stop to consider. All Mr. Blunt knew was that to his ear there came a muffled whisper: "He will not know you, but he has been talking about you all day;" and then he tip-toed inside, and Robin went down to speak to Mr. Cameron.

They were still talking when Mr. Blunt joined them. His face was drawn, and there was an anxious look in his eyes; but the terrible fear, that by some accident his son had been killed—was already dead, had been relieved. He could breathe again, and hope had returned with the reaction.

"Who's the doctor you've called in?" he said to Robin. "They spoke to me about a Mr. Martin; is that him? I shall send off at once for Gull, and I'll go myself for Sir William Jenner; he's the one you ought to have had, he's seen him before. And who was it that gentleman in the train was speaking of, Mr. Cameron, as being so clever? Ah, yes, Lamb—that was the name; we'll have him."

"But he's a homœopath!" said Mr. Cameron.

"I don't care what he is, so long as he cures my son!"

"You know in the profession they don't agree!"

"Then let 'em fight it out! I shan't ask the reason why, provided they'll set him on his legs again. I'll have every doctor in London, no matter who they are or what they call 'em; it's all one to me, so long as they can make a cure of him."

The old bluster was coming back. The belief in his luck, and that things always came round right with him, was returning; he put his hands deep down into his pockets, opening and shutting his palms on the imaginary gold that he would shower on the fortunate restorer of his son's health. Mr. Cameron, looking at him, sighed, and then he cast a glance at Robin.

"You seem very tired," he said gently. "I am afraid you have not had much rest."

The remark attracted Mr. Blunt's notice.

"That was a nurse, wasn't it, I saw up there?"

"Yes, there is a nurse; but until somebody came I wouldn't leave him alone with her."

"That was right—quite right," said Mr. Blunt, approvingly; adding in a more kindly tone: "But you can go to bed now. I'm here now; I'll see after him.

He shan't want for nothing; he shall have the best that money can get. Ah! the Prince himself shan't ha' been better 'tended on than he shall be. How it happened that he's laid up like this I can't think. Whatever brought it on? Can you form an idea, eh?"

"The carriage we came in from Whitby was so cold and draughty," said Robin; "that was the first of it. He was very unwell then for more than a week, but he was so anxious to go and get lodgings and find out about you. Oh, I can see it all now!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears suddenly. "His coat was so thin, and the day was bitterly cold, and the omnibuses were so full, that he had to go outside two of them."

"Outside! Outside a 'bus! My son!" Mr. Blunt staggered a full pace back, staring at her.

"And he was away almost the whole day long," she continued, "without having anything proper to eat."

"Why, he must have been mad—clean gone out of his senses! and you too, to have let him!"

She shook her head.

"You forget how anxious we were to go away from here. He knew how little money there was left, and a long bill owing."

Mr. Blunt dropped down into a chair as if he had been shot at."

"My God!" he cried; "I've killed him! He'll die, he'll die! I know he will. O Lord, what shall I do, what shall I do? what will become of me?" And hiding his face in his hands, the wretched old man burst into tears.

Robin jumped up and stood gazing at him with alarm. Mr. Cameron, with a ready guess at the remorse which had seized him, went over and put his hand upon his shoulder.

"Th' Almighty's going to punish me by taking him from me," he went on brokenly; "I holding out and he wanting. O Lord, spare him! only spare him, and I don't care what else comes to me!"

"Hush!" said Mr. Cameron sternly. "You forget

that God is not man. Do you think that our Heavenly Father is influenced by such motives as have made you stubborn and revengeful to your son? Let us down on our knees and ask mercy of Him; let us beg Him to spare Christopher to us. I will offer up a prayer in which we will all join."

And they all three knelt down, Mr. Blunt the first to shuffle off his chair, the last to rise. All his pomposity and swagger had gone from him; there was no more talk of what he was going to do; the all-important *I*—*I*—had dropped out of his conversation. Only when Mr. Cameron spoke of returning, he implored him not to leave them; and when Robin bade him good-night, he whispered in her ear:

"Pray for him again. Pray God to spare him!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

EVERYONE was agreed that few things were more touching than old Blunt's devotion to his son. Really, he might be pompous and vulgar, but he must certainly be a kind-hearted man.

Most of us are caught by sentiment, and in Wadpole the story of the father's distress, his suffering, and now his joy at the so-far-made recovery, appealed to people's sympathies and opened their hearts towards him.

The whole neighborhood far and near, for miles around, called to make inquiries after Christopher; and in place of ignoring Mr. Blunt, as formerly, he was asked for especially, to receive the congratulations everyone was anxious to give to him.

Snatched from the very jaws of death, Christopher had been brought back to Priors. Again he and Robin were living under the same roof as his father.

It was Robin herself who had made the proposal, Mr. Blunt had not dared to; and though Christopher was filled with an unspeakable yearning to be back in his old home, with its quiet and comforts around him,

he forebore to let drop even a hint that might influence Robin in any way; but the one wish of her heart now was to make amends to Christopher. She wanted him to see, by her devotion, how she had learnt to value his generosity. For far beyond anything it is possible to put into words had been his tenderness towards her —so enduring and so great that the confidence between them was complete; and saving only where the knowledge would now give him pain, nothing was hidden by her. In this offer to return to Priors with his father, Robin saw another opportunity; and in the joy with which Christopher received it, the pleasure and satisfaction he evinced, she was amply rewarded for any sacrifice it had cost her.

Still far too weak to be able to receive ordinary visitors, Mr. Cameron, and with him Georgy Temple, came daily to see him. Their engagement had become an acknowledged fact now, and the wonder and amazement of it past; no one except Mrs. Temple troubled themselves about it. Mr. Blunt had to confess himself staggered, and did not feel easy until he had trumpeted forth his penetration, and how he had hinted as much to her mother.

"Not," he said, "that then I took it by any means for granted, you know; but she was happening to be mentioning a certain gentleman who had popped off in a hurry after getting his *congee*," and he nodded his head and winked his eye meaningly; "and I asked her if it mightn't have something to do with a certain Mr. C——, who didn't live fifty miles off from here."

Robin was close by, and Georgy for a moment felt a little confused before her. What would she think of this story her mother had gone about telling, that she had refused Jack? Looking at Robin, she said frankly:

"My mother will have it that my cousin made an offer to me; but those who know him and me best are better informed on the matter."

It was Robin's turn now to grow red, Christopher's to come to the rescue.

"But every one knew," he said, "that Mr. Dorian-Chandos meant always to go. I remember the very first time I saw him he spoke of his intention to travel."

"And he did go once," said Mr. Cameron, "and came back again. Oh, how I did dislike that fellow that night! and the odd thing was I couldn't think why, for it hadn't struck me then about being in love with Georgy, you know."

The laugh turned against him gave the conversation a little diversion, and it wandered away from Jack into a discussion on the prospects of marriage and the hopes entertained by Mr. Cameron regarding a living. How pleasant it was to lie there and listen to the banter which went on between them! Many times Christopher found himself laughing quietly, more especially when, after a time, Robin had been drawn in and was led away to be as merry as it was her wont to be.

That night, walking home, Mr. Cameron gave Georgy the history of the probation their two friends had gone through, and how close the recent trial had drawn them together.

"I love that girl," he said, speaking of Robin; "and you, Georgy, you must love her too."

"Well, she said, "I don't say that I won't. I'm a little inclined that way already, which speaks volumes for my good disposition, seeing that the two men I think most of have each separately made that same demand of me already."

"Yes, but mine is in a very different way."

"No," she said stoutly; "I don't know that it is. When Jack asked me to be good to her, he had not a thought beyond being her friend; the mistake he made was in being over-confident."

Later on, when Georgy had convinced herself by seeing the good understanding which existed between the husband and wife, she purposely introduced Jack's name.

"I want to get over," she said, "the little awkward-

ness there seems to be in talking about him. Some day he will return, and then what are we to do?"

So to Robin when alone, or, if together with Christopher, she began speaking of Jack, telling them where he had been, what he had seen, what he was doing.

"He had just reached Calcutta when he wrote last," she said on one occasion.

"It must be a great pleasure to see his mother," Robin ventured to say.

"H'm!" and Georgy puckered up her face. "I can't say; from the tone of his letter it did not particularly strike me that he would break his heart over their parting. But I know her—at least I know her through my father and that is quite enough for me."

"Does he intend to stay long?" asked Christopher.

"Not with her—I don't think he does. I don't think he quite knows what he means to do; sometimes he speaks of returning, sometimes of going on. Papa wants him to come home at once, but I don't know whether he'll do so. He hasn't asked my advice, or I'd settle his plans in the twinkling of an eye."

"Why, what advice would you give him?" said Christopher. "I'm curious to know."

"In the first place, I should tell him to come back for reasons that make it important he should be here; and secondly, I should recommend him to settle down and take a wife to look after him—he'll have to marry—he must! Who's the estate to go to?"

Jack marry! Jack have a wife! The thought rushed upon Robin as if such an idea had never presented itself to her before. She felt obliged to move, to alter her position. She put down the work she had in her hand, and stood up for a moment, almost unconscious of what she was doing.

"Are you going for my medicine?" Christopher asked, and Robin was off, relieved by the necessity of something to do.

All that evening she was more than ordinarily devoted to Christopher; watching him, she seemed to anticipate every wish and want, and when the others had left, and they two were alone, she went over to him, and while settling his cushions, said:

"Christopher, I want you to get strong; you must make haste, and be as quick as ever you can, and let us get away from here and go to some place where it is sunny and warm, and you will get well. I am longing to be off with you again."

"Oh, you may depend upon me! I'm not going to waste my time; I'm going to put my back into it, I can tell you."

He spoke cheerily, although his heart was not in what he said. Far rather than go anywhere away, would he remain where he was. Already the invalid dread of travel and bustle possessed him, while each day seemed to increase the sweet repose which had come to him since he had been here. Surely never before had the place looked so lovely, the fields so green, the sky so blue; in every passing change of nature a fresh beauty seemed opened to Christopher's eyes. The budding trees, the bursting blossom, all seemed to him to speak of that Hand which made these things so fair to see.

"What are you thinking of, Christopher?" Robin would ask, as he lay there with his eyes fixed, silent, lost in thought; and brought back to earth, Christopher would say:

"I don't think I was thinking at all. I was only wondering, when all is so beautiful here, what can heaven be?"

* * * *

Although removed from immediate danger, Christopher's recovery was anything but complete. The doctors who had seen him dwelt much on the benefit to be derived from a milder climate, and the efforts of those around him were directed towards building up strength sufficient for him to undertake the journey.

Since his return to Wadpole his improvement had been so marked as to justify hopes being entertained for a speedy departure.

"It'll be a hard matter for me to bear up when he goes away," Mr. Blunt had said to Mr. Cameron; adding in answer to the curate: "Oh, they won't want me; there's never been a mention of my going. I should only be one in the way—as I expect I am now very often!"

Jealous as he still remained, the old man was at length learning the hard task of yielding up his will for the sake of his son.

"Here, you give it to him," he would say to Robin, when he had been at much pains to procure something he fancied Christopher might like. "He'll take it from you—eat it if you ask him."

Little did Robin ever guess the sting it gave him to say those words. Mr. Blunt had suffered a martyrdom before he had been brought to confess that she might have a precedence before himself.

Since Christopher had been mending, except in an indirect way to Mr. Cameron, Mr. Blunt had never reverted to the circumstances which had caused his son's illness. Finding when he came home that every one attributed it to the draughty carriage in which he had traveled from Whitby, Mr. Blunt adopted the reason which the curate had circulated; but compunction was still the mainspring of all his actions, and often when sitting silently by, as those around thought dozing, he would be going over that six months' struggle, every detail of which, in those first few days of the illness, he had made Robin relate to him.

With Christopher he had never approached the subject; to hint at it in any way he found impossible. Actions, not words, must tell Christopher how sorely he repented. To every one his changed manner to his son was visible, and it established their good opinion of him that he continued to show so much feeling and delicacy. Among others, the rector noticed it; and

one day, paying a visit to Christopher, in token of his interest he said:

"I wish your father had something that would interest and occupy him. He must find time hang very heavy on his hands."

"I fear he does," said Christopher. "I often wish he had something to do; but at his age a fresh pursuit is difficult to take up."

"It is."

"Particularly to one accustomed to manual labor, as he has been. Work—if not the actual work itself, superintending such as he has been used to—that is what would really interest him, and he 'll do it well, too."

"Then why don't you give him the opportunity? He was talking before you came down of finding you a house: express a wish that he should build one for you."

A slight flush came into Christopher's face.

"Sometimes," he said, "I think I may never want one."

"Come, you must not talk like that," said the rector, encouragingly. "I trust before long we shall see you on your legs again."

Christopher smiled.

"Oh, so do I," he said; "but I asked Cameron the other day, to tell me the truth, what they said about me."

"Well?"

"Yes, he told me. I knew I must be in a very critical state; not without hope—yet not without danger. It's best to know, isn't it?"

"It's best that you should think so, my good fellow," and the rector sighed softly.

"Yes, because, too, of anything one would like to do. I should like to have a church built. If I could persuade my father, Mr. Temple, would you help me?"

"I, Christopher?"

"Yes; because I want it built at Uplands; and it's your parish, you know."

"Those two, Georgy and Colin Cameron, have been talking to you, I can see." The rector shook his head a little gravely.

"Not to me they haven't; but I have heard them laughing together when they were sitting with Robin. It was she principally who told me about it, and we both said what a nice thank-offering it would be."

Mr. Temple's face brightened.

"Well, yes it would," he said; "but I know you, Christopher. You had a little thought of Cameron and Georgy all the time."

"Knowing about them didn't present any objection."

"Ah, so I fancied." And he sat thoughtfully for a little time. "No, no," he said, shaking his head; "its too much to hope it will ever come to pass. They'll have to wait for something else to turn up—my toes, most likely. I'm not as young as I used to be, and its a comfort to me to think, if anything should happen, that Jack would be certain to pass on the living to Georgy's husband."

"Should we have to get his consent about Uplands?"

"I suppose we should. I am not very well up in such matters, but of course he'd have to be asked; he's patron of the living, and lord of the manor too."

"When you write, would you ask him?"

Mr. Temple hesitated.

"I don't know that I have any right to say 'No;' but the cost would be very great, and your father——"

"Oh, leave my father to me." He laid his hand on his heart. "Something here tells me," he said, "that when I see my way to asking him, he won't refuse me."

"Neither will I, then. Make your mind easy; I'll write to the Squire for you."

CHAPTER XL.

THE same mail which took out Mr. Temple's letter to Jack, took one also from Georgy.

". . . Everyone is wishing you back," she wrote. "The other night, at 'Priors,' with the Christopher Blunts, we were all talking of you. Have you heard how ill he has been?—not expected to recover, but now mending, and ordered abroad immediately? They will start as soon as he can go, and I do not know when it is likely they will be back again. Perhaps I may as well say I have grown much more lenient to your once-upon-a-time weakness for Robin; the truth is, I know her now, and my verdict on you would be, 'He couldn't help it.' You have no idea how devoted to her husband she is—quite different to anything we used to see. The love is by no means all on one side now, as I once feared it might be.

"I have no separate news to tell, and, as papa is writing, you shall be spared repetition. He will let you know how much you are wanted at home, but by no one more than me; so come back, Jack, *do!* Your would-be cousin, Colin Cameron, still continues spasmodically jealous of you. Yet my cry is, Come—come soon, by return of post if you can; only come! come! come!"

Who shall separate love from jealousy?

Jack crushed up the letter in his hand, as if it contained something he could not bear to see. Then he said:

"Well! why not? What good is there in staying away? If they are not there, I may as well go." And he stood hesitating, frowning, measuring the attraction to return with the temptation which had driven him away.

When a man has come out of such a furnace as

Jack had passed through, he dreads the heat of the fire, although it is afar. But subtle as love's power is, most men have interests in life in which it plays no part. On these, of late, Jack had tried to fix his thoughts. It was in the distraction they would bring that his hopes were centred.

He had done with love forever, so he said; and, saying it, he would straightway fall to dreaming about Robin, recalling bitterly the time when, knowing her love was solely his, he had held it but cheaply.

"*If* I had but spoken to her then!"

Ah, little "*if*," how great a part you play in many a life-long tragedy!

Besides these two letters from Georgy and Mr. Temple, there were several others of more or less importance, all bearing on the advisability of return.

The country was in an agitated state; the county member was an old man; there was a very general feeling in Wadpole that his mantle would fall befittingly on the shoulders of Mr. Dorian-Chandos. But how could it reach him when so far away? Moreover, it was highly essential to the Liberal interest that a popular representative ready to step in should be near. Then on the estate the tenants were dissatisfied; a fear was spreading that, like his uncle, Jack did not mean to live among them.

"I must go back," he said; "I can't go farther on, that's plain. And if what Georgy says is true, it ought to make my task easier. After the first I need not live there altogether; and when they are there I need not see much of them. At all events the thing has to be done, and I must do it!"

For the moment decision generally makes us feel lighter. Jack gathered up his correspondence, spread out Georgy's letter, folded it up, and with the rector's put those two separate together. "I can't make out what it is that he means about Uplands, and the Blunts building a church there." And in truth the rector had intentionally been rather vague; he was

somewhat in doubt himself whether it might not prove a sick man's fancy. Everyone could see that Christopher's state was critical; but then he had always been delicate, and those creaking doors were proverbial for lasting out those that looked stronger. However, if it never came to anything—and raising it on old Blunt's gratitude was very much like a foundation of sand—so long as it helped to bring Jack home he did not mind. Mr. Temple had a keen relish for politics; and since this distant rumor of a dissolution he had been anxious beyond measure that Jack should return. The half of his letter had been filled with what this one thought, and that one said; and these expressions of his neighbors' good opinion naturally gratified Jack's pride immensely.

A man is worth little who feels no ambition. And already Jack's thoughts had run so far ahead that his canvassing was over; he had obtained his seat, and was making his maiden speech in Parliament.

What is it that ofttimes, in a moment, turns the current of our thoughts, and of a sudden brings us face to face with some forgotten danger? There, spread out before him as he had never seen it until now, lay the whole of that misery which, had not Christopher interfered and his better self prevailed, would have been now entailed on him and his forever! "Thank God!" he said fervently; and so great a hold had it taken on him that he had to wipe the damp moisture from his forehead.

Perhaps until now Jack had never realized how much value he set on all he would have forfeited. Mentally he drew a picture of himself as he would have been, with the world condemning him and its back turned on him. Exiled from his home, dreading to meet friends and neighbors, forced into company with those he despised, driven to seek distraction where he could find it. And then Robin! Oh! his soul was stirred, his heart grew sick recalling women he had known in the position she would have

been in. Although they might be separated forever a thousand times rather as they were! He had her memory still to hold dear, the memory of his pet, his plaything, his child-love Robin, with which none living could interfere; and those days coming back, they brought with them recollections of her, games they had had together, lessons he had taught her, little things she had learnt to do for him. Again he watched the would-be nimble fingers struggling with the buttons she wanted to master. And then once when something ailed him, her ecstasy at his consenting to take some *tisane* she had made, the eager face, the loving, tender eyes—ah, how little changed since then! "Never!" he said; "no other one could ever fill her place." Love lay buried in his heart, and over it "Sacred to Robin" was written.

A very sober mood hung over Jack that day, set down by his mother to their approaching separation. Lady Malcolm, never having troubled herself about her son in her life, suddenly discovered for him the most ardent affection. "And the dear boy is so attached to me," she said to those around; "naturally he feels, who else is there that can take such an interest in his welfare?" And in token of this, Jack was let have no peace on one subject—he must get married; he ought to get married; whom would he marry?

"But think, my dear—only consider. You must some day marry somebody."

Lady Malcolm felt her time was short; she must make the most of it.

"Must I?" said Jack, unmoved. "I don't see the necessity. I have spent twenty-seven years of single life very happily.

"You forget that your uncle was alive. You had nothing to leave then—no responsibility." Jack looked no more convinced. "What would become of the estate, with no brothers; unfortunately none that can inherit after you."

So far as the small Malcolms were concerned, Jack felt devoutly thankful.

"Oh, there are the Temples," he said inadvertently.

"The Temples! What Temples! the George Temples? *that* family!"

"*That* family," echoed Jack, imitating her emphasis.

Lady Malcolm sniffed the air with contracted nostrils, as if even at that distance their odor was offensive to her. "I always detested Maria Temple," she said, "and I dislike her husband inexpressibly; and there are no sons there." The want made her voice more cheerful.

"There are daughters, though," said Jack maliciously, his back a little up now. When she had not cared what had become of him, the Temples had always made a home for the lonely boy. "Isabel, the married one; Dora, the youngest; and Georgy."

"Georgy! why does she get separate mention?"

"Because she is deserving of separate notice, besides being an especial favorite with me."

"Oh, really! I was not aware! My future daughter-in-law, I presume, that is to be?"

"No," said Jack stolidly; "she wouldn't have me."

His mother gave a contemptuous little laugh.

"I don't see how you can possibly suppose that;" and then her tone altered, and with a sharp look at him she added: "unless you've asked her already."

Jack did not reply.

"I won't believe it!" she said angrily; "don't tell me that one of those girls—one of Maria Temple's daughters—has refused you?"

"My good mother, pray spare me! As you yourself often say, we must draw a line somewhere, and I draw mine at naming the young ladies who have rejected me."

"Ridiculous! absurd!" said Lady Malcolm. "I hate mysteries! if you can't have confidence between a mother and a son, where is it to be?" and fearing if she stayed longer her ruffled feelings might lead to a

further display of temper, she left Jack to himself, determined to write to Wadpole by that mail and find out what truth there was in this story.

Few moments come more sadly than those in which we realize that some one very near to us has no part in what we feel and what we do. Just now Jack had a terrible hungering after a little sympathy, not so much in speech as in person. He wanted to talk with some one, to open himself out, in a way; and he had to confess that his mother was further off from him now than when they were, except in name, absolutely strangers one to another. Looking at her picture from time to time—she was a very beautiful woman when the portrait had been taken—Jack had built a castle in the air, which had crumbled in pieces the very day after his arrival. It was his first experience of worldliness in the midst of domesticity, and the atmosphere of the home disagreed with him entirely.

He felt at once that after having fulfilled the decent requirements entailed by such a far-off visit, he should be only too glad to get away; and he sat down to this feeling the hurry he was in to make the arrangements for his departure. He did not write to say he was coming, because he should get to England almost as soon as his letter; and he had seldom experienced a more thorough sense of relief than when he had made his farewells and was fairly started on his homeward journey. A feverish haste possessed him to get back; and now, the monotomy of steamer-life beginning, it struck him a little drearily that he had not much of personal interest to go back to—he could not even claim Georgy now as he used.

"I suppose," he thought, "she'll be wanting to get married. Fancy her choosing that curate chap!" There was a *soupcon* of humiliation in the fact. Certainly, even up to the time of his leaving, Jack had always believed in an under-current of more than sisterly regard entertained for himself by Georgy. "I wonder," he said, "if nothing of this sort had come

about, whether in time I should have brought myself to think about it;" and after a few minutes' reflection: "No," he said, "never; it would be like marrying a sister to marry Georgy."

Jack had got rid of his mother, but the thoughts of marriage still pursued him. When one has something to leave, he wants somebody to leave it too Who was that somebody to be?

CHAPTER XLI.

DURING the first few weeks after Christopher Blunt returned to Wadpole, so marked and visible was the improvement he daily made that it began to be counted on as all but certain that before long he would be sufficiently convalescent to bear the fatigue of another removal.

Those who congratulated Mr. Blunt on his son's recovery further cheered the old man by pointing out that this power of regaining strength argued a sound constitution, and doubtless, though Christopher might never be more robust than he had hitherto been, it was not impossible he would outlive many who now came to make inquiries about him.

Already a dozen plans were under discussion as to where their first move should be, Robin receiving more gratitude than he once would have conceived it possible to give her, because, without in any way asking the question, she had assumed it a matter of course that Mr. Blunt should accompany her and Christopher.

Happily the weather was not very severe, and nothing now but a little more strength was needed to commence their journey. But having reached, and very rapidly too, a certain stage of recovery, Christopher seemed to come to a standstill, and nothing that was suggested, or thought of, seemed to advance him further.

Mr. Blunt, finding ease in the feeling that he was doing something, summoned from London one physician after another, but with no better result than all agreeing, that additional strength must be gained before it would be prudent to move him. How was that strength to be obtained? No one seemed able to solve the question. Christopher, happy, tranquil, surrounded by those he best loved, seemed the only one not disturbed by the delay.

Since February, when they had brought him down to Wadpole, the winds of March had blustered and swept by, the showers of April had watered leaf and bud, and now May was coming to a close—fresh, flowery May, sweet month of blossom. Very sorely had the shifting beauties of this fickle spring tried Christopher; even Robin and his father could shut their eyes no longer, and although neither confessed it even to themselves, each felt a terrible heart-sinking that in spite of all their efforts he was getting weaker.

Cheerful as he always was to them, striving to make light of his pains and troubles, this certainty had not escaped him either; and one day when Mr. Cameron was sitting with him, he said suddenly, and apropos of nothing:

"I don't believe that I shall ever get better, Cameron."

Mr. Cameron was silent.

"You don't think so, do you?" he went on to say, now pausing for a reply.

"Well, I don't know that it counts for anything what I may think. I have so often taken it into my head that people won't recover and they do, that positively I begin to fancy I must be an alarmist—rather inclined to look on the dark side of things, you know."

Christopher smiled.

"I never discovered it before," he said.

"No; haven't you? I imagine I am, though," and Mr. Cameron sighed a little despondingly. Of late he had been terribly cast down about his friend. It seemed

to him easier to give up all the people in Wadpole than to part with Christopher. Constant companions the two had become. Not a day went by without some portion of it being spent together.

Mr. Blunt was never better pleased than when the curate was with them. With the knowledge of past circumstances which he possessed, he could thoroughly unburden himself to Mr. Cameron, and give free vent to those self-reproaches which so terribly oppressed him.

"These illnesses give us ample time to reflect," said Christopher, resuming the conversation.

"They do indeed. To me the illnesses in our lives are like stepping-stones across the dark river. At each one we pause and look back."

"And forward, too."

And the beautiful hope lighting up Christopher's face was reflected back in Mr. Cameron's.

"Ah!" continued Christopher, grasping the hand stretched out towards him, "events are often ordered for us far better than at first we see. There was a time, as you know, when the thought of leaving all behind was a terrible wrench to me; but not now—that is past—that has been taken away."

Noting things going on around, which it was thought he did not see, Christopher was aware of much which those near fancied hidden from him: the efforts at control made by his father and by Robin, so that no contention between them might disturb him in any way; the struggle gone through by each; the will subdued, the sharp words swallowed down—all was but the surface of veneer. Let the necessity go by, and the old arrogance and dislike was certain to burst forth on the part of his father.

And then, through the confidence freely given him while they were together, he was able now to more clearly understand Robin's character. Unconsciously she had delivered to him the plummet by which he could sound the depths of her nature. Her heart

given once there it would stay. However deep down she might bury Jack, the memory of past love would abide with her for ever. Nothing was hidden that Christopher did not know. Long ago all had been confessed, and all forgiven her.

Watching her, letting his gaze rest upon her as she sometimes sat, unconscious that her dreamy eyes betrayed the thoughts that strayed afar, Christopher's heart would ask a question, "Of what, of whom, was she thinking?" In the life she led now, there was such a lack of occupation, so many hours with nothing to do, nothing to make any call upon her. Idleness is a most seductive danger; to those who have anything to forget, tired limbs often lessen the weight of heavy hearts.

Robin was young, and when the years are few the stream of fancy runs so swift and strong, that every passing breath has power to set it flowing.

True, Christopher had but to move, to sigh, to speak, and in an instant Robin's care and thoughts were all centred on him. She was at his side, had taken his hand; her head was nestled close down. Ah yes! a thousand sorrows might be more sad than to be taken now! But though he had tried to speak of the possibility of having to leave her, he had never found words to tell her of this fear. The mere approach of any doubt seemed to fill her with alarm; the old look came back into her face which he remembered seeing there when together they were watching her father.

So, except to Mr. Cameron, Christopher kept silent as to his misgivings. Besides, all was not yet lost; hope still very often alternated with fear, and though seeing very clearly the gravity of his condition, he was aware that much yet remained in his favor. If he could but get sufficient strength to go away and try the prolonged benefit of some purer atmosphere, even the particular doctor to whom his faith was pinned did not despair.

It was he who from his childhood had known Chris-

topher. He had attended his mother, had been told the family history, and, with Mr. Blunt, shared a knowledge of his disease which others knew nothing of.

It was the recollection of those previous warnings given to him which now stung Mr. Blunt so severely in the midst of what he was doing. Suddenly, without any apparent reason, back would come some speech he had made, some wish that he had uttered. How, thinking that money was running short, fancying that they must be pinched, he had hoped from his heart and soul it might be so. He'd starve them out; want would soon bring them to their senses. If they didn't know how to behave themselves, he'd teach them.

Unhappy old man, these recollections now seemed to madden him! To deaden their pain he would rush to the only remedy he knew of; but with the dram in his hand, he would pause, put it down, and turn away—even the solace of oblivion he was ready to forfeit, fearing it might be displeasing to Him who could restore Christopher.

There was a terrible bitterness in the feeling that he was mocked by prosperity. Except in that one matter of his son, everything was going well with him. Never had his lucky star seemed more in the ascendant. Shares which for years had been worth next to nothing daily began to rise in value; ground which he had bought for a mere song people made him good offers for; speculations, risky, wild, entered into when he was not quite master of his usual judgment, all turned to gold and prospered; and in the midst there was a canker-spot that blighted everything, making what would have been joy, heaviness, and what would have been sweet, bitter.

Though the riches of the whole world should come to him, of what value would they be with no one, when he was dead and gone, to leave them to!

In past days, before this dread had come, he had been full of rant and bluster as to what he meant to do.

He would marry again, take another wife, have another family to make his heirs and leave his riches to. Now that the blow had fallen, every resource seemed taken away. Not a single thought of comfort presented itself to him.

"Father," said Christopher one day, when, with the hope of interesting him, Mr. Blunt had been speaking of the unexpected increase in the value of some mining shares which for years had not paid a penny; "Father, if I get well, will you build a church for me?"

"Will I do what, my boy?"

Christopher repeated the question.

"A church!" said the old man in amazement. "Why, you're not thinking of turning parson, are you?"

"No, it's not that; for my recovery—a thank-offering I should like it to be."

"Ah! I'd give most of all I possess to see that brought about." Then, fearing that he had spoken despondingly, he hastened to add: "And so we shall, I hope, in good time; only it seems rather long in coming. But there, it doesn't do to be in too much of a hurry; Rome wasn't built in a day."

Christopher smiled.

"I've been thinking as I lay here," he said, "how nice it would be to have something to point to—to show, so that people might say, 'Look! he built that, in memory of his son!'"

"I don't know what you mean," said the old man hoarsely. "How in memory?"

A terrible grip had seized hold of him; his breath seemed to die away.

"In memory of my recovery," said Christopher simply. "Don't you know how in old times people made vows if certain things occurred what they'd do?"

"Well? and did it come to pass what they wanted?"

"Generally, I think. Very often it did."

Mr. Blunt gave a sigh. Drowning man as he was, with every hope of safety sinking from his sight, each straw of promise was a thing to clutch at. If God—whom in prosperity he forgot and in trouble feared—was to be propitiated by the building of a church, he'd at once strike the bargain, and promise that the handsomest money could raise should be built without delay. He'd superintend it himself; it would be a work to occupy, to amuse him.

Christopher, unable to guess at these resolutions, concluded that his hesitation sprang from the outlay such an undertaking would entail.

"You always say how lucky your life has been, father."

"Yes; and so I've had cause to. Up to now," he added discontentedly.

"In many ways God has been very good to you," continued Christopher.

The old man gave a half-hearted nod of assent.

"I'm not making any complaint," he said doggedly; "although a good deal of what's been done has been taken out of late in all I've seen you forced to suffer. So if anything 'll come of building churches, I'll raise one in every parish you like to name, so in puts you on your legs again. You're all I've got to look to, Christopher; so you must set to work and get well, 'cos of your old father."

Christopher smiled encouragingly, but the father could not smile back; the look that lighted up his son's face stabbed him to the heart. He had to make a pretence of getting up to turn away, and stand looking for a moment out of the window.

"From there, towards the right, you can see Uplands," said Christopher. "If the church stood on the hill, its spire would be visible from this window. And Cameron must be the rector; then he and Georgy Temple could marry, and she wouldn't be separated from her father. Only think how many that would be making happy—me, Cameron, Georgy, and Mr. Tem-

ple! I call that getting at once the value of the money."

"Very well; we'll talk the matter over again a little later. I see Robin coming up the walk; I think at present we won't mention it before her."

The instinct of suffering was beginning to make Mr. Blunt tender towards those who suffered. His own pain made him quick to detect the ring of the true metal; and though many sympathized with his trial, he knew that none but Robin shared in his agony.

CHAPTER XLII.

SO as the months passed by the busy world went on its daily round, and the atom of it called Wadpole, while watching its course and the events in which it was pleased to fancy it had some share, grew unmindful of the interests close at hand, and ceased to be engrossed in the affairs of those who but a short time before had furnished the constant topic of conversation.

Every now and again a report that young Blunt was worse would set them speculating, and surmises would be freely hazarded as to whether the old man would marry again; and if he did or if he did not, what would become of Robin? The feeling of wanting to get rid of them had long since been swept away. Mr. Blunt's anticipations had been more than verified. Had they been able to receive them, no one in the neighborhood would have refused an invitation to Priors.

Georgy Temple was there every day: she and Robin were now thoroughly friends together; and if ever Robin went driving or walking to get the air, Georgy was sure to be with her. It had been so arranged in the family that while the two went out, Mr. Cameron took Robin's place by Christopher's side, and bore him company.

Of those who saw him now, only two still clung to hope; and of necessity these were the two to whom he was most dear, Robin and his father.

It was not that they did not see what others saw, but they could not give him up. With them hope meant Christopher; to abandon one was to resign the other. The struggle they well knew would come, only they strove to keep it off a little longer.

Alas! how pitiful are the poor pretences to which in such straits as these we have recourse, how we talk of things in which there is neither heart nor interest, only that they serve to drift speech away from that which is absorbing and uppermost.

At that terrible dinner which she and Mr. Blunt took each day together—Robin making no opposition because Christopher wished it, and Mr. Blunt forced into acquiescence, because had he said "No" he might have been asked his reason—every time they took their seats there was on the old man's part the same assumption of his pompous manner; he brisked himself up, and puffed himself out, as if intending to do full justice to the dishes that were placed before him. He blamed Robin for not eating, and then sent his own plate away untouched; would press her to take some wine—some special wine that he had got up for her—and leave his own glass untasted.

It began to give him pain to see the young girlish face grow so pinched and thin, the cheeks lose their color and roundness. Mockery! Was it coming to him to cling to Robin? For the first time for months, when he reproved her for taking no care of her health, his voice sounded sharply.

Akin to what took place at dinner was the pantomime gone through each time the doctor's visit was paid. Mr. Blunt greatly here relieved by the strictures he permitted himself to pass on the want of knowledge displayed by him. "What," he asked, "could you expect from a country practitioner, a man whose life was spent in seeing farmers and plough-

boys?" Necessarily he judged everybody else by them. You need have the strength and constitution of a horse to satisfy such a man! Of course he thought Christopher weak — how should he think otherwise? Years ago, when they first came to Wadpole, he had been called in and had said the very same thing then, and shook his head in despair over what turned out to be nothing worse than a cold!

But in spite of his dissatisfaction, he hung back from sending for the other doctor—the one man in whom his confidence was placed. He knew that when he came he would not only have to hear the truth, but he would have to accept it; and with a certain dread foreboding of what that truth would be, he delayed the summons, until a day came when Christopher was so much worse that without a word from anyone he sent off the letter, begging the great physician to come without delay.

* * * * * * * *

Silent, brooding, apart from the rest, the old man spent the morning in his library; but as the hour drew near, forced by the fear of breaking down to assume more than his ordinary pompous manner, few would have guessed the weight of sorrow, the agony and despair, which that show of bounce and swagger was meant to cover.

"My friend, you grow worse as you grow older," thought the doctor; and Robin herself, troubled as she was, felt condemned at the shame for him which rose up within her: it seemed like being disloyal to Christopher, more especially as, instead of noticing it, he seemed more affectionate than usual towards his father. Clear-sighted as he had grown, Christopher penetrated the disguise, saw what this manner was meant to cover.

Pressed by the number of his engagements, the great man had explained that he should be forced to leave as soon as the sick visit was over. There was a train which would take him back to London, if he could get in time to the station. How Mr. Blunt

fussed about the carriage being ready! how he deplored that the doctor could not stay for luncheon! what a parade he made of the dainties that had been provided for him! One might have imagined he had no other care, so completely did he throw himself into every matter which had no connection with his son.

Unable to control her emotion, Robin had slipped out of the room. She would wait below until the doctor had gone, and then return. Already footsteps were on the stairs; Mr. Blunt and he were coming down.

"I should like to say a word to you alone before I go."

Mr. Blunt opened the door of the library, and they went in.

What was it he wanted to say? Robin felt she must wait and know; if but a crumb of comfort, she must have it; if all hope was crushed out for ever, she must hear it. Suspense had become intolerable; she could bear it no longer.

Oh, what an interminable time those few minutes of waiting seemed to be! Would they never come?

The handle of the door turned. Robin breathed again. It must be all right, and what he had heard must be good. He was talking fast, though she could not hear about what—laughing, loudly and discordantly, but still laughing, as the carriage drove away.

For an instant she watched it going, and then quickly turned herself round. The door had opened; Mr. Blunt had come in, and there, standing before her, was a man whose face was ashen, his cheek drawn in and sunken, his head drooped, his whole self fallen together.

Involuntarity she made a step forward.

"It's all over," he said; "all over. Nobody can't do nothing for him." And for a second the two stood gazing blankly into each other's eyes.

Then, as if the weight of sorrow had rent her heart, there burst forth from Robin a cry, echoed by the old

man, and they fell into each other's arms, and together sobbed on one another's necks.

Grief, the one common grief, had overleapt all barriers. What was there to be remembered except that they must lose Christopher? The fiat had gone forth —nothing more could be done for him. He might linger a few days, or longer, but there upstairs he lay —dying. Death was waiting at the door; already the shadow of his chill presence had fallen in that chamber.

"Robin, you'll stay with me? You'll stop here. I know I haven't acted right by you before, but you won't leave a broken-down childish old man, will you?"

"Never," she said.

"You promise me that?"

"I do. I promise that so long as I live, to me you shall always be Christopher's father."

CHAPTER XLIII.

GENEROUS hearts do nothing by halves.

Constantly now, looking round the room in which Christopher lay, Robin would ask, "Where is your father? I must go fetch him." And coming on the old man, stricken down and lonely, she would take him by the hand and lead him to the bedside of his son, and there together they would sit, Christopher trying to win them from present sorrow by making plans of what he wished them to do when he should be no longer near.

The reconciliation brought about between these two, to him most dear, had robbed death of its last sting. In the first freshness of his grief, his father would not be left alone, and, so long as she needed them, Robin would have a home and a protector.

Very tenderly had Christopher commended his young wife to the care of his father, who, in his turn, had promised most solemnly to perform all he was asked to do for her.

There was no need to make any demands of Robin. Knowing what Christopher would desire, his wishes were forestalled by her, and the best earnest of her future conduct was given in her present manner.

Perfect faith, perfect hope, peace within, at charity with all the world—who might not envy Christopher?

It was only for those from whom he was going that pity was needed, and daily, as he lingered on, the sympathy with them grew stronger.

People around talked about them, discussed them, spoke of them in their letters; so that it happened that Jack, just landed at Southampton and gone on to London to give some directions to his lawyer, was told by Mr. Clarkson of the sorrowful news about that "well-meaning young Blunt, who lay dying," of his wife's devotion, and the grief of the heart-broken old father.

"Christopher—Christopher Blunt, dying!"

Could it be true—was it possible? though Jack said but little in answer, he felt as if a blow had been dealt him which he staggered under. He left the office like one in a dream, to return an hour or so later, and desire that the papers which were to have followed him to Wadpole should be kept where they now were, as he had altered his plans and was going to remain in London.

In the meantime, he had written to the rector announcing his arrival, and had enclosed a note to Georgy, begging for an immediate answer.

Come what might—however his interests might suffer—if this news proved true he could not go to Wadpole; there would be a want of decency, of decorum in doing so. It might reach the ears of Christopher, and give him pain—might cause him, perhaps, to think worse things than he now did.

The whole day, no matter what he did or where he went, he could not rid himself of thoughts of Christopher. His face haunted him; his eyes pursued him; a sense of having done him an injury weighed on him like a nightmare.

If it was only possible that he could know something of what he felt—could have known how from his heart and soul Jack thanked him for what he had done, and what he had spared him from!

Casual acquaintances and friends whom he met, remarked that they thought him altered, without quite knowing how. Some men, whom he dined with, voted him not half as cheery as he used to be. The truth being that Jack felt as if he was not wholly there. To keep his thoughts fixed on those present was an impossibility. Every now and then, while seeming to listen to some choice scandal or racy story, his imagination carried him away to a sick-bed, where a man lay dying and a wife stood watching. As an excuse for his going early, he pleaded fatigue from the journey, premised that he had not yet become accustomed to dry land again, and with the expressed certainty that he should be more himself on the morrow, went off to the hotel where he was staying.

He wanted to be alone, by himself, ridded of company, so that he could give full rein to the thoughts that were hurrying at top speed through his brain.

An indescribable sadness had taken possession of him. Mr. Clarkson's report of Robin's devotion, coupled with the account given him by Georgy in her letter, left him with no doubt but that the love once poured out upon him had been transferred to Christopher. And right it should be—only if it could have been at some less cost than the belief that he had deserted her—cast her aside;—and he discontentedly reviewed the letter he had written her, thinking the best proof of how she had taken what he said lay in the fact, that the word he had asked for had never been sent in answer. This drop of gall, added to his melancholy, but strengthened its bitter flavor. Ah, there was a good deal in life that we made sorrowful! Chances thrown away which we would give all we possessed to possess again. The same regret, he supposed, came in turn to everybody, only some suffered from ill-luck more

than others—suffered deservedly, perhaps. Without saying that this was his case, Jack fell at once to compassionating Christopher. "Poor fellow!" he sighed; "he does not seem to have had much that was bad to answer for; and yet who could be in a more pitiful condition? His one great desire granted him; the wish of his life, Robin's love, given to him, and now he must leave her."

Without clothing his thoughts with words, or even letting them take shape, Jack went on probing deeper. Regret, compunction, remorse, were stirred within him until the measure of self-approbation seemed emptied altogether, and he was looking at the man he really was, unconsciously comparing himself with Christopher. It did not occur to him to wonder how little he was occupied by Robin. Death standing near seemed to hide her in its shadow. She was further removed from Jack than he had ever felt her. Without a thought of love, his heart lay within as a stone. How was this? Why should it be? Had he ceased to care for her?

* * * * * *

The same question might have been asked of Robin, to whom a few days later, while walking in the garden together, out of the sick-room from which she had enticed her, Georgy Temple suddenly said:

"Did they tell you—have you heard that my cousin Jack has come home?

"Home! Here?"

"No, not here; in London, where he speaks of remaining."

"Yes; does he?"

Robin said no more; for some moments thought no more. So completely had close companionship and long watching fixed her thoughts on Christopher, that it needed a positive effort now to take an interest in anything not relating to him.

Suddenly the words Georgy had said came back. Jack home! Jack near! Was it possible that she

could be told this and not care? She who a thousand times had gone over the meeting that must of necessity some day occur between them, and the distress and pain it would give her.

Possessing a very accurate knowledge of Jack's disposition, Robin had drawn upon her past experiences for the reproach he would feel towards her. Not a word had Christopher ever breathed of the letter in his possession; and Robin never questioned but the cause of Jack's absence had been the tear-stained, incoherent petition which she had entrusted her husband to send for her.

Bitterly had often come the thought that Jack had taken his dismissal very readily, refusing, withholding the one boon she had so desperately craved of him, that he would say he forgave her. Ah! forgiveness was not in Jack's nature. Forgiveness belonged to Christopher. But now all this storm of discontent was gone, and in its place indifference had come; so that it seemed to no longer matter whether he came or stayed away—whether they met or were parted for ever.

* * * * * *

"I told her," Georgy said, repeating what had occurred to Mr. Cameron; "but she hardly took any notice. She does not now, unless it happens to be something about Christopher. I could never have believed how wrapped up she has become in him; it seems as if in losing him the whole world is going from her."

Mr. Cameron sighed.

"And he is so different," he said, "so calm, so cheerful, so resigned; interested in everything and everybody. You should have seen how his face lit up when I told him that Chandos had returned. "Has he," he said, and his voice sounded quite strong. "Now the only wish I have left will be gratified; I shall see him again. Yesterday it didn't seem possible. All the day I was thinking so much about him."

Georgy looked her surprise.

"Really!" she said. "I wonder why?"

"You must give me the address of his hotel, so that I may write to him to come down here. I am to ask him from Christopher. Dear fellow! He said so simply: 'Tell him the request comes from me, and that he must not delay.'"

"Perhaps it is about the building of the church," suggested Georgy.

"I don't know; he did not say what it was about, and I did not ask him. He wanted the letter written, and that was enough for me."

So the summons was sent; and with Jack, to receive it was to obey. Never had he started on a journey with so much alacrity. By the next train he was on his way to Wadpole.

* * * * * *

Perhaps no better preparation for entering that sick-room could have been made than the thoughts which bore Jack company. He had spent much time during his homeward journey from India in disciplining himself to pursue a certain marked-out course of action. He had made plans for the present, and arrangements for the future. Suddenly he who disposeth had stretched out His hand, and lo, the project of that labor was melted away!

Was Christopher wishing to reproach him or to forgive him? Was it to exact any promise, or because of that desire which sick men often feel to be at peace with all the world before they die?

And then came the thought of Robin; how would she meet him? and what measure of the circumstances between them was known to those around?

Jack's heart beat strangely as, leaving the carriage he had driven from the station in at the Lodge gate, he walked up the avenue. He had asked no questions of the few people he had seen; and they, in their surprise at his return, of the cause of which they never dreamed, had vouchsafed no information.

The glory of departing summer lay on all around, flecking the trees with russet and with gold. There was a hush of stillness in the air, which made the rustle of the leaves distinct each time the soft wind swayed the branches and fanned them overhead. Between the trees a stretch of green spread out afar, with cattle, prized for the rareness of their breed, dotted here and there, taking their ease.

Surely no other land could match the prosperous quiet of a scene like this! Jack had an English heart, with pride of country at its very core; but now, as he went, all that he passed was lost to him, so strained were his eyes towards the house to catch a sight of it, and see the blinds still up, the windows open.

A sigh of relief escaped him as the servant who had watched his approach advanced to meet him.

"Won't you be pleased to take refreshment of some kind, sir?" he said, leading the way into a room where a well-spread table stood. "Master thought, coming from London, you might feel the want of something."

"No; I had all I needed before starting."

"Master hopes, sir, that you'll please to excuse his not being in the way, but just at present he doesn't feel equal to seeing anybody. Poor old gentleman! 'tis a terrible cut up for him."

"Naturally."

"Mr. Christopher is being told that you've come. Should I inquire, sir, if he's ready?"

"Do."

The man left him, to return, after a few minutes delay, and said that Mr. Christopher was quite prepared to see him now.

He led the way. Jack followed him up stairs to a room the door of which was opened by someone who went out as he was admitted.

There, in a bed drawn over near the window, the prospect from which he could see, lay Christopher. By his side sat Robin.

Only a minute before, as the door was opening, at the thought that perhaps she was inside, that he should see her, Jack's blood had seemed to turn to fire; now already he had forgotten her—forgotten all else save that he stood in dread presence of visibly approaching death.

She must have advanced to meet him, for they had shaken hands; and yet it seemed to him that he had not seen her, so riveted were his eyes on Christopher.

"It is very good of you to come so soon," he began in his feeble voice. "I knew you would come, but I hardly dared to expect you so early."

Jack pressed the hand put into his.

"I cannot tell you how sorry I am to see you so ill," he said earnestly.

"I am sure of that; there is no need to tell me. Of late I have so longed to see you again,—and you see the wish has been granted to me."

While they were speaking Robin had brought over a chair and placed it at the bedside, then she went to a further window and stood looking out.

Christopher's eyes followed her.

"Robin," he said, "come over here near me; I miss you."

She was at his side in an instant.

"I want to talk to you both together."

And he looked at them, letting his eyes rest first on one and then on the other; and then he stretched out his hands, and, while holding theirs, said:

"God is very good to let us meet like this again. My great desire was to say what I want to tell you like this—when I could speak to you both here, with the hand of each in mine."

Jack's face showed the pain he felt: he could find no voice to speak in: his heart and pulses thudded violently. Robin, pale, careworn, with the fountain of her grief run dry, listened in silence.

"You must forgive me," Christopher went on—it was to Jack that he was speaking—"for having in any

way broken a promise I once gave you. I could not leave unspoken anything for her to learn when I am gone. Oh, how blessed now comes the thought that she trusted me!—that that same night, ignorant of what you had done, she told all to me! You know now, dear love, don't you, that I was witness of that scene about which I then feigned to know nothing."

Involuntarily Jack's eyes were turned to Robin; hers were fixed on Christopher.

"It must not pain you," he went on, "anything I may say. It has no pain for me; only rejoicing to remember that you both showed me confidence—both listened to the voice which was stirring for good within you. The finger of that Hand, always stretched out to help us in our need, was lain on both your hearts—a sacrifice was asked, a sacrifice made, a sacrifice accepted."

His voice had sunk to a whisper; so great was his weakness that he had to wait for his lips to be moistened before he could continue.

After a time, with a feeble effort to take something from underneath his pillow, he showed them a packet which he would not let Robin open; but unfolding the paper took out two letters, the seals of which had not been broken.

"That is yours, Robin; and this"—turning to Jack—"belongs to you; neither of them have been touched or opened since they were written. As you then gave them to me, so I now deliver them back to you. That same evening I fastened them in this, and locked them in a box; and there, side by side, they have ever since lain together."

Mechanically Jack and Robin turned, and turned again, the letter each had been given. The sight of the hurried, hastily penned writing brought vividly back the circumstances of that repented of occasion. Humbled, heart-stricken, they turned towards Christopher. His face was smiling, his arms stretched wide

as if to encircle them; from out his parted lips came faintly forth the word "forgiven."

Already Robin had sunk down kneeling with her face hidden. Jack, untried in sorrow as she had been, struggled for an instant; and then, perhaps for the first time since he was a lad, his emotion overcame him, and tears streamed from his eyes.

Ah! it is in moments such as these we recognize that the image man was made after is divine. All he possessed, even life itself, Jack was ready to give, so that by it he could save Christopher.

Did Christopher by intuition guess this?

Exhausted he had sunk back, and there lay with his blissful eyes looking at the two heads bowed down on either side of him.

How long did they so remain? neither of the two could say; all that they knew was that of a sudden Christopher seemed to gather up his strength, and raise himself so that he took their hands again, and, they looking, saw as it were an angel-face turned heavenward to ask a blessing on them. His lips still moved, although—his voice sunken to a whisper—the words he said no longer could be heard; only at the last they felt the hands he held he joined together, and while they still remained clasped, the spirit of Christopher passed away for ever.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE stranger who visits Wadpole, and carries his steps a little further on to Uplands, is sure to be attracted by a name he hears coupled with many things he sees.

Blunt's cottage, Blunt's institute, the church, the schools, are all the work of Mr. Blunt, whose pride now is to be connected with every charity around.

No longer ashamed of his self-made position, nor—as of yore—of his humble origin; his boast now is that

he was a working man, and made his money with the hands they see—hands which he tells them labored hard for years—hands which can labor still, as he has shown in the building of the church, raised to the memory of his son, and superintended by himself.

Always being added to, always improved, Upland Church is the show church of the neighborhood. From far and near, for miles around, people come to its services.

Mr. Cameron is the rector. He is married to Georgy Temple, and is firmer than ever in that once scoffed-at conviction of being the most fortunate man in the world.

Perhaps there does not live a happier woman than Georgy. The once neglected men and women amongst whom she dwells, much as they approve of their rector, simply worship her, and listen to her teaching with greater respect, because she is a good judge of a horse, and has such an eye for a dog.

Mr. Temple, contented in having his daughter near, seems infected with the desire to follow—at a distance—the foot-steps of his son-in-law. He performs his own duty, and seems to find satisfaction in it; although there are many in Wadpole still ready to affirm that necessity, not choice, is the main-spring of his actions, Mrs. Temple having declared that no curate shall put foot in the parish until she has married her daughter Dora.

Mr. Dorian-Chandos, member for Wadpole, is one of the leading men in the county; a good landlord, a staunch friend, rich and poor respect him equally.

Wherever they go, he and his wife have the warmest welcome given them; indeed, it would be hard to decide which is the greater favorite of the two—Jack or Robin.

Besides being a wife, Robin is a mother now; her eldest boy bears the much loved name of Christopher. In him, Mr. Blunt seems to see again his son; his greatest pride is to hear himself called "Grandfather."

One spot in Upland Churchyard is always green and

gay with flowers, which Robin and her children bring. And when the little ones have lain their posies down, they play around, while she stands looking—where the sun's last rays slant down—upon a plain white cross, inscribed:

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